NARCISSUS IN VALÉRY'S POETICS

By

DOROTHY HOPKINS SCHNARE

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By

Dorothy Hopkins Schnare

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Chairman: Dr. Raymond Gay-Crosier
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This study proceeds from the conviction that the most logical way to arrive at an understanding of Valéry's poetics is by means of his poems, in particular, his Narcissus poems. Valéry used many different forms to expatiate on his poetic theory. Excerpts appear in letters, aphorisms, and in his poems. Specific details are amplified in essays, lectures, and the Cahiers. One of the most persistent problems in attempting to understand Valéry's poetics is how to confront this mass of disparate material in order to articulate it succinctly. Critics tend to see the theory as a mass of fragments and even contradictions. Proceeding from the poems to the theory, as Valéry generally did, is a viable way to synthesize the essential tenets.

Valéry wrote three major works on Narcissus: "Narcisse parle" (1891), "Fragments du Narcisse" (1926), and Cantate du Narcisse (1939). Since these works and revisions

of them were composed over a fifty year period, they function as a poetic autobiography demonstrating the essential elements of his poetics.

One chapter is devoted to each of the three works. In each case, the same pattern is followed, providing background details, confronting the problem of influence, analyzing the Ovidian elements, and closely examining the text. The focus is kept on what these aspects reveal about Valéry's theory. For example, in the first chapter, a study of "Narcisse parle," a poem in the Symbolist manner, the question of influence is seriously entertained. Valéry's early poetic theory is formulated, primarily, on the poems and poetic aims of Mallarmé and the theories and technique of Poe.

The second chapter concentrates on the "Fragments du Narcisse" and demonstrates Valéry's classical aims. Comparison of it with "Narcisse parle," underlines Valéry's method of composition, a series of rejections, revisions, retentions, and regroupings. Finally, the Cantate, a fusion of his Symbolist tendencies and his classical aims, reinforces a number of the basic elements of Valéry's poetic canon, for instance, his problem solving approach, and his view of poetry as an art of language.

Valéry's theory of poetry is personal. He indulges in poetic creation for himself first and for others only second, remaining, on the whole, indifferent to his audience. His theory centers on considerations about the poet and the problems he faces or poses for himself. For Valéry, poetry is a serious intellectual exercise involving long labor and

constant revision. A poem is never finished, for the creative process is a quest for perfection, for pure poetry. As much consciousness as possible is his fundamental rule for poetic creation. He insisted upon writing under strict constraints, imposing the maximum number of conventions and rules to increase the degree of both consciousness and poetry.

His poetry is at once cerebral and sensuous making the Narcissus myth the perfect vehicle to explore his acute sensitivity and heightened consciousness. The Narcissus poems are a clear demonstration of his conviction that a poet could spend a lifetime rewriting the same poem. Conscious effort and attention to the beautiful details of poetry provide a myriad of angles from which the poet can approach the same theme to learn more about the creative act.

Valéry postulates no dogmatic theory of poetry. Inward-looking and self-reflective, he prefers to question and experiment. The cumulative impression which the Narcissus poems produce about Valéry's poetics is one of unity and continuity. During the long period from "Narcisse parle" through the "Fragments" to the Cantate, his poetic preoccupations and practices remain basically unaltered. They are always related to the larger question of how to know the mind.

INTRODUCTION

The persona in Paul Valéry's literary production is Narcissus whether he is named Monsieur Teste who says: "Je suis étant, et me voyant; me voyant, me voir et ainsi de suite..." or the angel seated at the edge of the fountain in Valéry's final poem, "L'Ange." Named, unnamed or renamed, the figure of Narcissus is a constant of Valéry's work.

Valéry wrote three major poems with the word Narcissus mentioned in the title: "Narcisse parle" (1891), the "Fragments du Narcisse" (1926), and the Cantate du Narcisse (1939). These three compositions will serve as the framework for this study of Valéry's poetics. Elaboration and clarification of the tenets of Valéry's poetic theory are made possible by means of a close examination of the background and details of his three major Narcissus works.

Valéry's study of poetry is much broader and involves much more than the statement of an "art poétique." He researched the creative process in depth and focused on the mind's act of "making." That is why he chooses to speak of "poïetics" - art as making:

> J'ai donc cru pouvoir le reprendre dans un sens qui regarde à l'étymologie, sans oser cependant le prononcer Poïétique, dont la physiologie se sert quand elle parle de fonctions hématopoïétiques ou galactopoïétiques. Mais c'est enfin la notion toute simple de faire que je voulais exprimer.[1]

What interested Valéry about his own poems was how he created them, their very genesis. The actual process of fabrication was so important to him because it led him back to and taught him more about his primordial interest - the mind.

The poems are a starting point for further research and allow him to make statements about theory, implicitly by means of the poems themselves, explicitly in letters, lectures, and essays, nearly always after the fact. While aspects of his poetic theory developed and changed, much of it remained constant and became more precise over the years, and this is what makes a close study of the Narcissus poems so revealing and rewarding in an attempt to synthesize Valéry's theory of poetry. They span his whole career from his early insistence on the sonnet as an ideal form in the late 1800's to the very end of his career with the publication of the prose poem, "L'Ange" in 1945. There is a Narcissus poem for each major creative period in his life. In the early period, the Symbolist period, he produced "Narcisse parle." Of all his youthful poems, he felt that this one alone approached his ideal. During the years of his return to poetry, there is a significant

revision of "Narcisse parle" for the Album de vers anciens. The period of maturity, with the masterpieces of Charmes, includes the three part, highly acclaimed, "Fragments du Narcisse." Finally, his artistic endeavors centered on drama, and in this last period he wrote the libretto for the musical drama: Cantate du Narcisse.

While Valéry's Narcissus is engaged in the search for self, it is not as the result of an identity crisis, nor is his preoccupation with the figure of Narcissus pure narcissism in the psychological sense.[2] The starting point for Valéry's Narcissus poems is not an unconscious impulse to lend imagery to a universal human problem, that of the relationship of the self to the self, but rather a very conscious effort to resolve problems of poetry, and, thereby, to reach an understanding of the creative process. This understanding is, in turn, a means to the fundamental goal which was to know and understand the mind and its potential. Undoubtedly, the quest into the mind is simultaneously the quest into the integrity of the self and individuality. As Narcisse says in the "Fragments:"

> Mais moi, Narcisse aimé, je ne suis curieux
> Que de ma seule essence;
> Tout autre n'a pour moi qu'un coeur mystérieux,
> Tout autre n'est qu'absence (O, I, 128).

The mind's goal is a "moi pur," absolute consciousness.

One of the most significant aspects of Valéry's choice of the mask of Narcissus is its total suitability

for him. It is, at once, both important and unimportant as subject matter for his poetry. Because it is an old re-worked vehicle for poetic production with a long poetic history (not the least of which is in the French literary tradition), it is insignificant in and of itself, a banal subject. Consequently, the poetry itself becomes of prime importance as Valéry intended. The act of creation which he saw as a serious intellectual exercise involving subtle modulation and constant revision becomes the focal point of his poetic activity. He continuously stresses the unimportance of subject in its usual sense and insists that the interest in a poem, for him, lies in the composition: "Cependant la seule pensée de constructions de cette espèce demeure pour moi la plus poétique des idées: l'idée de composition" (O, I, 1504).

If the story of Narcissus is not in and of itself of prime importance for its subject matter or thought content, Valéry's use of it, nevertheless, has symbolic significance. The introspective, ever-reflective Valéry, always on the verge of utter solipsism, is certainly like Narcissus continually gazing at his reflection in the water, as he endlessly seeks total self-possession. Ultimately, of course, both Valéry and Narcissus are doomed to failure, and Valéry is keenly aware that absolute knowledge is inaccessible. Yet, he sees the purity of purpose involved in the constant striving for a single, unattainable ideal goal, be it the "moi pur" or pure poetry.

The Narcissus myth is Valéry's most important myth. A number of short articles and one full-length study of the theme recognize the importance of the figure of Narcissus in Valéry's work. Pierre Fortassier in "Le Thème de Narcisse" begins:

> Le regard le plus superficiel ne peut manquer de percevoir, dans l'oeuvre de Paul Valéry, l'importance du thème de Narcisse . . . . Un examen plus approfondi révèle la présence de ce thème, plus ou moins latent, à peu près partout.[3]

The longer study, a dissertation, attempts to reassess the importance of the Cantate du Narcisse. Basically, however, it is a comparative study with some limited explications de texte.[4] The third chapter purports to be a "close reading of the three Narcissus works of Valéry."[5] Unfortunately, this is not the case. Only three pages, for instance, are spent in an examination of the last two parts of "Fragments du Narcisse" which contain a total of 166 lines. The shorter studies make no claim to be in-depth analyses of the three works. None of these studies recognize that the three poems, stretching over Valéry's career as they do, are a logical steppingstone to an understanding of Valéry's poetic theory.

While it is clear that the theme of Narcissus in Valéry's work has not been adequately or thoroughly explored, there have been important studies made of

Valéry's poetics. Two full-length studies, in particular, come to mind immediately: Jean Hytier's La Poétique de Valéry[6] and W.N. Ince's The Poetic Theory of Paul Valéry.[7] The latter, subtitled Inspiration and Technique, is interesting but limited since it concentrates primarily on trying to make a case for the role of inspiration in Valéry's work. It is often suggested that Valéry is contradictory and less than honest about the role of inspiration in his work, but he does not disregard emotion, imagination, intuition or inspiration, for that matter. He emphasizes instead that these are not sufficient in themselves but must be complemented and disciplined by intelligence and as much consciousness as possible.

Hytier's book, much more comprehensive than Ince's, is the most widely acclaimed study of Valéry's theory of poetry. It is an indispensable aid to an understanding of the subject. One major point of difference between Hytier's work and this present examination is that he does not, with any consistency or detail, compare Valéry's theories about poetry with his practice. He neglects or overlooks the fact that the poems generally came first and then the theory. Writing "Le Cimetière marin," for example, led eventually to "Au sujet du 'Cimetière marin,'" an important pronouncement on poetic theory. A revealing account of Valéry's return to poetry, "Le Prince et la Jeune Parque," followed the writing of the poem La Jeune Parque and the Narcissus poems eventually

resulted in "Une Causerie sur Narcisse" on September 19, 1941, which was later published as "Sur les 'Narcisse.'"

Valéry's essays and commentary on his poems are in a way a defense and illustration of them. Because of the fact that Valéry's interest in poetry is based on his preoccupation with the effect of the poet's labor on the the poet himself and how much of the mind poetry is capable of engaging, it is important, if not essential, to start with the poetry. Also, Hytier does not make use of the Cahiers, an indispensable tool for the study of Valéry's poetic theory.

A number of short articles as well as chapters in various books about Valéry also serve to introduce, outline and clarify Valéry's poetics.[8] In a short chapter entitled "The Poetic Theory of Paul Valéry," Henry Grubbs touches on poetry as exercise, the role of inspiration, the necessity of rhyme, the theory of multiple solutions and the importance of revisions.[9] The poetic problems which concerned Valéry, as outlined by Grubbs, come up naturally in the course of examining the Narcissus poems, and, therefore, they can be explained and amplified in direct correlation with the poetry.

As I shall demonstrate, nowhere is it clearer than in the Narcissus poems that, for Valéry, poetry is a long labor involving constant revision. Moreover, a poem

is never finished except by accident, as was the case with "Narcisse parle" which Pierre Louÿs needed immediately for the first issue of his journal, La Conque. Valéry saw poetry as an art of language and, like Mallarmé, recognized that the impurity of language necessitated separating its poetic from its ordinary practical function. The Narcissus poems show that Valéry is a word sceptic, testing the limits of language. The role of music in poetry, the importance of form as opposed to content, the intention to utilize to the fullest the conventions of poetry, the goal of pure poetry, all are shown, in this study, to be integral parts of the long development from "Narcisse parle" through the "Fragments" to the Cantate.

A chapter will be devoted to each of the three Narcissus works. While the emphasis will not always be the same, a similar pattern of analysis will be followed in each chapter. There will be a general introduction and survey of background details, a study of possible influences, a demonstration of the Ovidian elements Valéry utilizes, and a close examination of the text itself.

In the first chapter where "Narcisse parle" is studied, the role of influence is most carefully dealt with since it is crucial to an understanding of the poem and the poetic theory behind it. Mallarmé and Poe, in particular, materially affected "Narcisse parle," which is, essentially, a poem in the Symbolist manner. Since

there are two major versions of the poem, concentrated study of Valéry's revisions reveals his specific technical considerations and important aspects of his poetic theory. Valéry's ultimate rejection of certain Symbolist traits comes to light, as well as his theory of the possibility of different solutions to a poetic problem, and the necessity for attention to the smallest details of poetry and calculated effects.

With the "Fragments," studied in chapter two, it is necessary to confront the mass of analyses already existing since the poem has been studied repeatedly. Rather than indulge in additional interpretative speculation, I have concentrated instead on comparison with "Narcisse parle" which figures materially in the composition of the "Fragments" and clearly demonstrates Valéry's serious interest in poetic technique, especially the importance of utilizing standard poetic conventions. Synthesis of several studies of the work leads to comparison of Valéry with Lucretius, the Romantic poets, and Racine. This focus has the advantage of putting Valéry's aims into perspective. Subject matter is inconsequential but the poetic challenge which an old theme affords is an important factor. The expression of the poet's philosophy has no role in the poem. In addition, the "Fragments" underscore Valéry's classicism.

In the third chapter I examine the Cantate du Narcisse.

Since the Cantate is the least familiar of Valéry's Narcissus works, I have approached it in a slightly different manner. I have tried to piece together background information which has not previously been assimilated. I also spend more time on interpretation since, unlike the "Fragments," the Cantate has rarely been analyzed. An additional change in format is caused by Valéry's use of a different genre which requires examination of his concept of theater. On the other hand, as I develop the substance of this modified approach, I continue to focus on Valéry's poetic preoccupations and his theory of poetry demonstrating that Valéry's third work is a fusion of the other two in that it combines his classical aims with his Symbolist tendencies.

Close study of these works in the three chapters which follow will show the actual progression from poem to theory and the emergence of what is never a dogmatic theory of poetry but allows for a viable synthesis and a fuller understanding of Valéry's poetics. Unlike the Teste cycle and the Leonardo works, the Narcissus poems are not a mere phase of Valéry's development. Neither are they primarily an aspect of Valéry's intellectual biography and personality, as Michel Décaudin contends.[10] The poems about Narcissus are instead exactly what Valéry suggested they were: "une sorte d'auto-biographie poétique."[11] And the word poetic must be emphasized, for the

poems constitute a veritable autobiography of Valéry's poetic development. They span his total poetic career and cover the full range of his artistic concerns.

NOTES

[1]Paul Valéry, OEuvres, éd. Jean Hytier (Paris: Editions Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), I, p. 1342. Hereafter cited in the text as O, I, or O, II, in the case of volume II. All emphases and ellipses are Valéry's unless otherwise indicated.

[2]For a detailed discussion of the psychological ramifications of Valéry's choice of the theme of Narcissus see Gilbert Aigrisse, Psychanalyse de Paul Valéry (Paris: Editions universitaires de France, 1964). The most pertinent chapter reprinted under the title: "Une Manière de narcissisme" appears in Les Critiques de notre temps et Valéry, présentation par Jean Bellemin-Noël (Paris: Garnier, 1971), pp. 119-132.

[3]Pierre Fortassier, "Le Thème de Narcisse," Europe, 49 (1971), 49. See also "Narcisse chez Paul Valéry" in Pierre Albouy, Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969), pp. 181-187, and Otto Hahn, "Le Naufrage de Narcisse," L'Express 736 (1965), 44-46.

[4]Lester Dufford, The Myth of Narcissus in the Works of Paul Valéry (Dissertation: Florida State University, 1970). The comparisons include discussions of the myth in Ovid, Le Roman de la Rose, François Villon, a "broadside ballad," James Shirley, and Mallarmé.

[5]Dufford, p. 4.

[6]Jean Hytier, La Poétique de Valéry (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970).

[7]Walter Newcomb Ince, The Poetic Theory of Paul Valéry (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1961).

[8]One of the most important is Jackson Mathews, "The Poïetics of Paul Valéry," Romanic Review 46 (1955), 203-217. Mathews discusses the lectures given by Valéry on poetics at the Collège de France from 1937 to 1945 concentrating, as Valéry does in the lectures, on "sensibilité."

[9]Henry Grubbs, Paul Valéry (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), pp. 83-99.

[10]Michel Décaudin, "Narcisse: une sorte d'autobiographie poétique," L'Information Littéraire, VII (1956), 55.

[11]"Sur les 'Narcisse,'" in Paul Valéry vivant (Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1946), p. 283.

CHAPTER I

"NARCISSE PARLE"

Of all Valéry's early poems, "Narcisse parle" has the longest and most distinguished history. This poem, which has often been singled out and praised as the best or one of the most beautiful of the many poems written between 1888 and 1892, occasioned the first public recognition of Valéry. "Son nom voltigera sur les lèvres des hommes" were the words written by Henri Chantavoine (in his generally laudatory article) in the Journal des Débats of April 7, 1891, to describe Valéry after the publication of the "jolis vers" of his "Narcisse parle" in La Conque on the 15th of March 1891. Gide alone, of all Valéry's friends, was critical of aspects of the poem. His comments will be discussed later. Others like Pierre Louÿs, Henri de Régnier, and Hérédia praised the poem wholeheartedly. Valéry himself, who was keenly disappointed with the poem and greatly bothered by the considerable praise it received, nevertheless, felt that of all his early poems it was the closest to his ideal. "Ce poème demeure pour moi un premier état charactéristique de mon idéal et de mes moyens de ce temps-là."[1] He also valued it enough to send a copy to Mallarmé who wrote in response: "Votre

'Narcisse parle' me charme et je le dis à Louÿs. Gardez ce ton rare."[2]

Appreciation and acclaim for the poem continue even in recent times. Henry Grubbs, for example, feels that "Narcisse parle" is one of Valéry's first distinctive poems because of its delicate harmonies, purity and originality of imagery.[3] Agnes MacKay remarks:

> During the spring and summer of 1891 Valéry was still writing poetry. "Hélène," "a large fresco which should evoke antiquity," and "La Fileuse," are both of this period, but the most characteristic poem among his early works, and which played a part in his evolution, was "Narcisse parle."[4]

In the course of a brief examination of some of the poems of the Album de vers anciens of which "Narcisse parle" is an integral part, Berne-Joffroy singles it out: "Mais l'un d'eux, 'Narcisse parle,' annonce déjà les pures harmonies de La Jeune Parque."[5] And Pierre-Olivier Walzer wrote: "Quand Adrienne Monnier publia, en 1920, l'Album de vers anciens, 'Narcisse parle' en était l'un des plus beaux ornements."[6]

In addition to his praise for the poem, Walzer provides extensive background material (pp. 85-96). Perhaps his most notable contribution to the study of "Narcisse parle" is his discussion of the sonnets anterior to the "Narcisse parle" of La Conque where he includes the publication of the following sonnet which he sees as the version"[. . .] apparemment la moins travaillée,

représentant par conséquent le point de départ de tous les Narcisses:

NARCISSE PARLE

Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur!
Source magique, à mes larmes prédestinée,
Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur
Mon image de fleurs funestes couronnée!

Car, je m'aime!... ô reflet ironique de Moi!
O mes baisers! lancés à la calme fontaine,
Et vous, roses! que vers ma vision lointaine
Epand sur l'eau ma main suave, avec effroi.

Cher Narcissus! tes lèvres ont soif de tes lèvres!
Et mes regards, dans ce cristal échangent leurs fièvres!
Faut-il ma vie à ton amour, ô spectre cher?...

Toi, ma splendeur, incline-toi vers l'améthyste
De ce miroir dont m'attire la lueur triste
Ainsi qu'un blanc vase harmonieux, ô ma chair!..."[7]

Henri Mondor, however, in "Deux poèmes inédits," Hommage à Paul Valéry published by Les Nouvelles Littéraires in 1945 gives the following version as "la toute première ébauche inédite" of "Narcisse parle." The first five lines are the same as those of the version presented by Walzer. The lines which differ are:

O mes baisers jetés à la calme fontaine,
Roses vaines que vers mon image lointaine
Epand sur l'eau ma main suave avec effroi!

De mes propres beautés ma bouche est amoureuse
Je lis dans mes regards ma fureur malheureuse
Ma vie adore un spectre inviolable et cher.

> O ma soif de moi-même, invoque l'améthyste
> De ce miroir dont m'attire la lueur triste
> Où dort ce noble vase harmonieux, ma chair!
> (O, I, 1556-57).

Both versions have the same date, 28 September 1890. Still another version of the sonnet and a prose poem rendition appear in O, I, pages 1555 and 1557.[8] Considerable additional background material is found there also (pp. 1552-1564) including about two-thirds of the lecture given by Valéry entitled "Sur les 'Narcisse'" (pp. 1559-61). More of this same lecture, given at the home of Marguerite Fournier in Marseille on the 19th of September 1941, appears in Paul Valéry vivant.[9]

During this talk Valéry gave his personal account of the poetic origin of "Narcisse parle" explaining, among other things, the source of the poem's epigraph: PLACANDIS NARCISSAE MANIBUS.

> Il existe à Montpellier un jardin botanique où j'allais très souvent alors que j'avais l'âge de 19 ans. Dans un coin assez retiré de ce jardin, qui était beaucoup plus sauvage et bien mieux autrefois, se trouve une voûte et, dans cette sorte d'anfranctuosité, une plaque de marbre qui porte trois mots: PLACANDIS NARCISSAE MANIBUS. Cette inscription m'avait fait rêver; mais voici, en deux mots, son histoire.
>
> En 1820, à cet emplacement, on avait trouvé un squelette et, d'après certaines traditions locales, on pensa que c'était la sépulture de la fille du poète Young. Celle-ci morte à Montpellier vers la fin du XVIII^{e} siècle, n'avait pu être enterrée dans le cimetière, car elle était protestante. Son père l'aurait

> ensevelie, un soir de clair de lune. La jeune morte se nommait NARCISSA. On identifia avec elle les restes retrouvés.
>
> Pour moi, ce nom de Narcissa suggérait celui de Narcisse. Puis l'ideé se devéloppa du mythe de ce jeune homme, parfaitement beau, ou qui se trouvait tel dans son image.
>
> J'écrivis en ce temps-là un tout premier Narcisse, sonnet irrégulier, et origine de tous ces poèmes successifs.[10]

That "Narcisse parle" was a sonnet first is not at all unexpected. Valéry's first poems were almost exclusively sonnets: for example, "Solitude" and "Elévation de la lune" possibly written as early as 1887; "Les Chats blancs," 26 September 1889; "Mirabilia saecula," 1 October 1889; "Le Cygne," 5 October 1889; "La Mer," 10 October 1889; and "Fleur mystique," 22 June 1890.[11]

His early devotion to the sonnet form is an indication of his genuine appreciation for the constraints of fixed forms and the strict conventions of poetry. Artistic discipline is an important aspect of his theory of poetry. In his theoretical writings, the necessity of form is apparent as early as 1889:

> Il [the poet] se gardera de jeter sur le papier tout ce que lui soufflera aux minutes heureuses, la Muse Association-des-Idées. Mais, au contraire, tout ce qu'il aura imaginé, senti, songé, échafaudé, passera au crible, sera pesé, épuré, mis à la forme et condensé le plus possible pour gagner en force ce qu'il sacrifie en longueur: un sonnet, par exemple, sera une véritable quintessence, un osmazôme, un suc concentré, et cohobé, réduit à quatorze vers,

> soigneusement composé en vue d'un effet final et foudroyant.[12]

Later in Calpin d'un poète: "Il faut faire des sonnets. On ne sait pas tout ce qu'on apprend à faire des sonnets et des poèmes à forme fixe" (O, I, 1454). His appreciation for the sonnet form, in particular, is apparent when he states: "Gloire éternelle à l'inventeur du sonnet."[13] In the course of an amusing passage, he recounts what he would say if he were to meet the inventor of the sonnet: "Mon cher confrère, je vous salue très humblement [. . .] je vous place dans mon coeur au-dessus de tous les poètes de la terre et des enfers!... Vous avez inventé une forme et dans cette forme les plus grands se sont adaptés."[14]

Pierre Louÿs, however, asked Valéry for a poem longer than a sonnet for the first issue of La Conque. Valéry relates this in a letter to Gide:

> Sachez, ô bon néophyte pour qui déjà se brode le pectoral et l'éphod, que Louis, notre magique Directeur (et pour moi aussi directeur spirituel), me demande instamment un certain prélude, initial pour la résonnante conque à paraître.
>
> Il ne me laisse pas même le temps de me récuser et de lui faire observer quelle est son audace de réclamer à l'Indigne, quarante vers [. . .].[15]

The following poem of fifty-three lines is the one which was published by Louÿs in the first issue of La Conque on March 15, 1891.

Narcisse Parle

Narcissae placandis manibus

O frères, triste lys, je languis de beauté
Pour m'être désiré dans votre nudité
Et, vers vous, Nymphes! nymphes, nymphes des
fontaines
Je viens au pur silence offrir mes larmes vaines
Car les hymnes du soleil s'en vont!...

C'est le soir.
J'entends les herbes d'or grandir dans l'ombre
sainte
Et la lune perfide élève son miroir
Si la fontaine claire est par la nuit éteinte!
Ainsi, dans ces roseaux harmonieux, jeté
Je languis, ô saphir, par ma triste beauté,
Saphir antique et fontaine magicienne
Où j'oubliai le rire de l'heure ancienne!

Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur,
Source funeste à mes larmes prédestinée,
Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur
Mon image de fleurs humides couronnée...
Hélas! l'Image est douce et les pleurs éternels!...
A travers ces bois bleus et ces lys fraternels
Une lumière ondule encor, pâle améthyste
Assez pour deviner là-bas le Fiancé
Dans ton miroir dont m'attire la lueur triste,
Pâle améthyste! ô miroir du songe insensé!
Voici dans l'eau ma chair de lune et de rosée
Dont bleuit la fontaine ironique et rusée;
Voici mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont purs...
Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent
D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent,
Et je clame aux échos le nom des dieux obscurs!

Adieu! reflet perdu sous l'onde calme et close,
Narcisse, l'heure ultime est un tendre parfum
Au coeur suave. Effeuille aux mânes du défunt
Sur ce glaque tombeau la funérale rose.

Sois, ma lèvre, la rose effeuillant son baiser
Pour que le spectre dorme en son rêve apaisé,
Car la Nuit parle à demi-voix seule et lointaine
Aux calices pleins d'ombre pâle et si légers,
Mais la lune s'amuse aux myrtes allongés.

Je t'adore, sous ces myrtes, ô l'incertaine!
Chair pour la solitude éclose tristement
Qui se mire dans le miroir au bois dormant,
O chair d'adolescent et de princesse douce!

L'heure menteuse est molle au rêve sur la mousse
Et la délice obscure emplit le bois profond.
Adieu! Narcisse, encor! Voici le Crépuscule.
La flûte sur l'azur enseveli module
Des regrets de troupeaux sonores qui s'envont!...
Sur la lèvre de gemme en l'eau morte, ô pieuse
Beauté pareille au soir, Beauté silencieuse,
Tiens ce baiser nocturne et tendrement fatal,
Caresse dont l'espoir ondule ce crystal!

Emporte-la dans l'ombre, ô ma chair exilée,
Et puis, verse pour la lune, flûte isolée,

Verse des pleurs lointains en des urnes d'argent.

(Fragment)[16]

It is not surprising that the poem has added after it the word "Fragment." The work, an ouvrage de commande, was, according to Valéry, written very quickly: "J'ai fait ce poème en deux jours ou six heures de temps sur commande, comme vous le savez, et je m'en repens. Il ouvrira La Conque d'une misérable sorte, et rougira de confusion...."[17] This form of "Narcisse parle" then was fixed by accident[18] in that Louÿs demanded it immediately (recall the details of Valéry's letter to Gide quoted earlier: "Louÿs [. . .] me demande instamment un certain prélude . . . "). Valéry would have preferred a much longer labor more consistent with his constantly held belief that poetry required long, arduous work, not quick facile verse making.

> J'ai pris ma plume, et me voilà dans les affres. Car le Narcisse longuement rêvé ne devrait se faire que minutieusement, à courtes heures! Et je souffre de la sentir s'augmenter facilement presque, et je suis très ému car

> je vois l'Oeuvre se détacher ingratement de moi et leurrer mon songe d'éphèbe solitaire.
>
> De grâce, si je le termine, et si je l'envoie à L., jugez-le et sans avocat du diable, et damnez-le à jamais, car cela ne pourra rien valoir si hâtivement fait. Mais vous ne vous imaginez pas quel déchirement![19]

In a later letter to Gide, he again deplores the hasty writing:

> Si vous avez lu mon hâtif poème, bien loin de l'oeuvre rêvée et que j'espère refaire un soir ou l'autre (car sans cet espoir je souffrirais) [. . .].[20]

A corrected version, definitive if one can use the word definitive about a Valérian poem, considering his attitude that a poem is never finished, appeared in the Album de vers anciens published in 1920. This version, revised during the beginning period of Valéry's return to poetry, has a number of significant changes.

Before discussing in detail the elements of Valéry's evolving poetic theory which are revealed by a close examination of the differences between the "Narcisse parle" of La Conque and the Album, it is helpful to place the poem in a historic perspective. This Narcissus poem, much more than Valéry's subsequent works on the same subject, has specific literary antecedents. At least four writers materially affected the poem. As a result, the poem can be placed squarely in the Symbolist tradition. That "Narcisse parle" is a poem in the Symbolist manner is a key factor which must be analyzed

in order to arrive at a clear understanding of the poem and its construction. First, however, a brief investigation of a much earlier tradition is necessary to establish Valéry's fundamental lack of debt to another possible literary ancestor: Ovid.

The Narcissus myth, particularly as it appears in the third book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, has received persistent attention from innumerable artists, especially poets, throughout the ages.[21] Not the least of these imitations and variations on the theme have been in French literature. Beginning with the Middle Ages and Narcisus (a poem of the twelfth century), the Roman de la Rose, the Ovide moralisé, and the troubadour lyrics,[22] it is easy to find outstanding examples in every century of the use of the story of Narcissus as told by Ovid. The members of the Pléiade, notably Ronsard in "Le Narssis" and the sonnet "Que laschement...,"[23] utilized elements from the myth for their love poetry. Metamorphosis, reflecting waters, and the problem of illusion were common themes in Baroque poetry so it is not surprising to see allusions to Narcissus in the works of such seventeenth century poets as Tristan, St. Amant, and Théophile de Viau.[24] In the eighteenth century, one of the most remarkable examples is Rousseau's "Narcisse ou l'Amant de lui-même." The nineteenth century is no exception, and by the end of the century, the figure of Narcissus became a veritable commonplace of Symbolism, occurring in the works of

Rodenbach, Régnier, Jean Royère, Gide, indirectly in Mallarmé, especially in his Hérodiade, and, of course, in Valéry who carries the myth into the twentieth century.[25]

Valéry's Narcissus, ever lucid, is a modern hero who knows from the start that his pursuit is in vain. He is, therefore, not the Narcissus of Ovid who falls in love with an image which he only belatedly recognizes as himself. To construct "Narcisse parle," Valéry borrows very little from the story as Ovid relates it.[26] In addition to withholding essentially all of the narrative details of Narcissus' background and life, Valéry also omits completely Echo's part in the tale;[27] and does not, for example, develop the vengeance motif which results in Narcissus' punishment for mocking and rebuffing Echo and the others who fall in love with him. Valéry's "Narcisse parle" is a non-narrative poem entirely free from the epic frame of Ovid's tale. Instead it is a lyrical poem intent on expressing an "état d'âme," and aimed at evoking a mood rather than retelling an ancient myth.

There is, however, one significant motif which Valéry borrows ever so subtly from Ovid: the transformation myth. The poem never alludes directly to Narcissus' ultimate transformation into a flower as in Ovid's account. Yet, the idea is certainly suggested by the opening words: "O frères! tristes lys . . . " and in the early version, by the line: "A travers ces bois bleus et ces lys

fraternels . . ." which continues the implications of the first line by the choice of the word "fraternels." In addition, the beginning of the line: "Mon image de fleurs . . ." also causes the transformation to come to mind although it might not have if Valéry had turned it around to read: "Mon image couronnée de fleurs humides!"

Valéry also seems to have absorbed some of Ovid's vocabularly.[28] In Valéry's "Narcisse parle" as in Ovid's account, there are several references to Narcissus' tears and to the fact that his efforts are in vain. In Ovid's Metamorphoses:

> Cum risi, adrides; lacrimas quoque saepe notavi
> Me lacrimante tuas: nutu quoque signa remittis
> (lines 459-60).
>
> Et lacrimis turbavit aquas, obscuraque moto
> (l. 475).
>
> Inrita fallaci quotiens dedit oscula fonti!
> (l. 427).
>
> Credule, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?
> (l. 432).
>
> 'Heu! frusta dilecte puer!'. . .(l. 500).

Valéry combines the two in:

> Je viens au pur silence offrir mes larmes vaines.

There is a reference to tears in the last line:

> Une diversité de nos larmes d'argent.

Again the ideas are combined in

> Hélas! L'image est vaine et les pleurs éternels!

The deeply discouraged tone of "Hélas" in the preceding line reminds the reader of Narcissus' expressions of

grief in Ovid's line: "Indoluit, quotiensque puer miserabilis 'eheu!'" (l. 495), and in line 500 already quoted above. In Valéry's work, the way Narcissus is described attempting to reach the image: "Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent/ D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent," corresponds, in a general way, to Ovid's description: "In mediis quotiens visum captantia collum/ Bracchia mersit aquis nec se deprendit in illis" (l. 429-30). The use of the color silver to describe the setting is found in both: "J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte," and in Ovid: "Fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis," (line 407). There is, in fact, a general similarity in setting. Valéry's landscape, like Ovid's has a pictorial quality. Its silvery cast is somewhat reminiscent of the silvery bright water and grassy area described by Ovid. To the extent that Ovid's setting can be said to reflect the mood of the languishing Narcissus, there is an additional parallelism. Overall, however, the ideal and unreal character of Valéry's decor is more in line with the typical symbolist landscape. Maja Goth sums up this aspect, setting the poem squarely in the Symbolist tradition in terms of theme as well as landscape:

> Valéry's first poem about Narcissus, Narcisse parle, which exists in different versions, is entirely in the symbolistic tradition of a search for the most exquisite form of beauty to be found in poetry. Therefore we have a scenery that is beyond reality:

> Narcisse stays at a moonlit forest pond; a nymph, lilies, silvery reeds, murmuring wells, night-blue woods, and sweet melodies of a flute are the traditional elements of that unreal landscape.[29]

The fountain's reflection of Narcissus surrounded by an enchanted landscape becomes the symbol of perfect beauty, endlessly sought, but ultimately unattainable. As Goth indicates:

> This landscape is an image of Narcissus himself - and Narcissus is the archetype of beauty. Absolute beauty can be found only outside of reality; therefore the enchanted, dreamlike and unreal aspect of the landscape. The purity of the objects: the reflecting surface of the water, the well, the jewels, the lily, the calix, the star[s], all of them symbols of purity, shall lead to the formation of absolute beauty. Narcisse laments the impossibility to reach this absolute, to possess it.[30]

The symbols of purity catalogued by Goth are, of course, commonplace occurrences in Symbolist poetry as are the Mallarmean words "azur" and "pur" also found in the poem.

The preceding brief introduction to the elements of a Symbolist landscape and typical Symbolist vocabulary point to Valéry's debt to Symbolism. In fact, the "Narcisse parle" of 1891 can be seen as a period piece since it was written under the direct stimulus of the decadent and symbolist milieu. Environment and, more specifically, influence are two overlapping and essential factors which must be reviewed in a detailed consideration of this poem. At least four distinguished literary

figures need to be discussed in this connection: Huysmans, Gide, Poe, and Mallarmé. All four were of consequence in the creation of the poem.[31]

In general, a solution to the question of influence remains very elusive and extremely difficult to pinpoint conclusively. Valéry attached great importance to originality. He once said: "Je me mire dans cette phrase du P. Hardouin (166..): 'Croyez-vous que je me suis donné la peine de me lever tous les jours de ma vie à quatre heures du matin pour penser comme tout le monde?'" (O, II, 1536). He usually refused to admit, and often vehemently denied, that anyone had influenced his work. Yet, the question of influence which certainly becomes negligible very soon in Valéry's literary career, cannot be ignored in the early and formative period of his poetic history and is of special interest in the case of "Narcisse parle."

In 1891, in the middle of the Symbolist period,[32] when "Narcisse parle" was first published, Valéry, by means of correspondence, had only recently begun his relationship with Mallarmé. Earlier, he had been introduced to Mallarmé's work by Gide, Louÿs and the Symbolist reviews, after first reading short excerpts from "L'Après-midi d'un faune" and "Hérodiade" in Huysmans' novel A Rebours. A Rebours itself had made a very deep impression on Valéry, who kept it as his constant livre de chevet and called it his Bible.[33] As for Gide, who was at that time

definitely in his own Symbolist period, he had just become close friends with Valéry, seeing him often for serious conversations and corresponding with him frequently, sometimes even twice a day. In the case of Poe, Valéry's admiration, extremely fervent during this period, was to be of long standing, culminating when he wrote "Au sujet d'Eurêka" published in 1923.

The following discussion of the four literary figures mentioned above focuses on how their influence and ideas are reflected in "Narcisse parle" and the poetic theory which underlies it. The contribution of Gide and Huysmans is less dramatic than that of Mallarmé and Poe, and it is also somewhat less tangible and more general. Actually, the influence of all four often tends to overlap in broad areas. For example, since Gide was often in Paris, Symbolist poems and, especially, the works of Mallarmé were more readily available to him than to Valéry at Montpellier and, consequently, Gide often copied whole poems for the highly appreciative Valéry and sent them along with his frequent letters. Valéry was certainly aware of Mallarmé's sincere appreciation of Poe's poetry and technique, and Valéry not only discovered Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" in A Rebours, he read there of des Esseintes' great admiration for Poe.

Although it could probably be argued that there is more of Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" in Valéry's "Narcisse parle;" there is also something of Huysman's hero, des

Esseintes. Valéry's Narcissus may not be as neurasthenic and pathological as des Esseintes, but there is in him that acute sensitivity to his surroundings and the desire and tendency to reduce life to inactivity and contemplation. The languishing weariness and deep melancholy associated with the realization of the impossibility of sustained relief from "ennui" is also similar although it is equally apparent in Hérodiade.

In discussing the impression of A Rebours on the young poet, Mondor makes the following judicious assessment:

> Sans faire siens tous les aphorismes ricanants de Baudelaire, chers à des Esseintes, et les intermittences d'un coeur mis à nu, il n'en excluait pas l'envoûtement: 'Le plaisir d'étonner et la satisfaction orgueilleuse de ne jamais être étonné' lui semblaient des principes un peu sommaires; mais le devoir, pour le dandy, de 'vivre et dormir devant un miroir', le ramenait facilement à un Narcisse dont il ne devait plus se séparer. Quant à la solitude, 'loi de tous les esprits supérieurs', il ne sentait que trop, déjà, la part qu'il devrait toujours lui consentir.[34]

Jacques Charpier feels that by the time of "Narcisse parle," Valéry had shaken off the influence of all except Mallarmé.

> A l'époque, poussé à écrire par Louÿs, favorisé de la plume mallarméenne, Valéry éprouve alors la totale influence de son précieux correspondant. Elle chasse de lui les idoles qui, depuis sa quatorzième année, s'y étaient accumulées. Baudelaire, Huysmans lui-même sont découronnés. Toute la place, dans l'esprit de

Valéry, appartient au seul Mallarmé.[35]

Valéry's letters, however, attest to a serious and continued interest in Huysmans and A Rebours not to mention Poe:

> Je viens- par hasard! - de relire une cinquième fois A rebours et je ne songe plus qu'à le lire encore. Ne me méprisez pas trop, mais c'est mon livre. Quand je sens trop la fadeur de me voir, je déguste les pages sur la Salomé de Moreau, le voyage fictif à Londres, le finale si curieusement morne, et je me réjouis en mon coeur.[36]

This was written to Pierre Louÿs on the 19th of November 1890, when Valéry supposedly sent "Narcisse parle" to him! Just a short time before that, in another letter to Louÿs, dated 21 September 1890, Valéry wrote: "Tu sais que j'idolâtre Huysmans . . ."[37] and as late as 1895 the following note appears in the Cahiers: "Les hommes vivants et notoires que j'admire personnellement sont Messieurs H. Poincaré, Lord Kelvin, S. Mallarmé, J.K. Huysmans, Ed. Degas, et peut-être M. Cecil Rhodes. Cela fait 6 noms."[38]

Further evidence of the effect of A Rebours on Valéry is suggested by his discussion of decadence. At least at one point, he thought of himself as a decadent rather than a symbolist. For example, he wrote the following in a letter to Pierre Louÿs on June 22, 1890:

> Voilà pourquoi je ne m'intitule pas Esthète ni symboliste - cela a des significations trop précises et trop étroites. Je suis esthète et symboliste mais à mon heure, mais je veux quand il

> me plaira de le faire, verlainiser, oublier la rime, le rythme, la grammaire, vagir à ma guise et laisser crier mes sens..et je suis Décadent.

In the same letter, Valéry's definition of a decadent is a melange of des Esseintes and Mallarmé:

> ...décadent pour moi veut dire, artiste ultra affiné, protégé par une langue savante contre l'assaut du vulgaire, encore vierge des sales baisers du professeur de littérature, glorieux du mépris du journaliste, mais élaborant pour lui-même et quelques dizaines de ses pairs, alambiquant de subtiles essences d'art, et surtout vivant la beauté, attentif à toutes ses manifestations, se mêlant à la vie, toujours par quelque côté original et vibrant.[39]

The refined and unusual language of "Narcisse parle" and the desire to evoke absolute beauty are expressions of a devotion to decadence as Valéry describes it, as is his general disdain for Henri Chantavoine's article praising his poem.

A still greater influence on "Narcisse parle" and especially the poetic theory behind it was Poe. Like des Esseintes, and, of course, Baudelaire and Mallarmé before him, Valéry held Poe in very high esteem. In his first letter to Mallarmé describing himself, Valéry wrote: "Mais c'est qu'il est profondément pénétré des doctrines savantes du grand Edgar Allen Poe - peut-être le plus subtil artiste de ce siècle! Ce nom seul suffira à vous montrer sa Poétique."[40] It was probably Poe more than anyone else who affected Valéry's earliest theories on poetry.

T.S. Eliot suggests that Baudelaire was primarily

affected by Poe the prototype of le poète maudit while Mallarmé was interested in Poe's poetry and technique.[41] About Valéry, Eliot says: "But when we come to Valéry, it is neither the man nor the poetry, but the theory of poetry, that engages his attention and admiration."[42] While this is somewhat of an oversimplification, Eliot's appraisal of Poe's influence is, in essence, correct.

Evidence of the impression of Poe's theories on Valéry and his acceptance of them are apparent in his early essay on poetic theory, "Sur la technique littéraire," in his letters to Gide, Louÿs, Gustave Fourment, Mallarmé and others, as well as in the poem "Narcisse parle." The most important aspect of Poe's theory as far as Valéry was concerned was the role of lucidity in artistic creation. "-Celui qui m'a le plus fait sentir sa puissance fut Poe. J'y ai lu ce qu'il me fallait, pris ce délire de la lucidité qu'il communique."[43]

The idea that a poem should be written in full consciousness would always seem eminently wise to Valéry. There are several other points of Poe's theory which Valéry took up seriously. Lucienne Cain mentions that in his lectures on poetics at the Collège de France, it was obvious that Valéry was not limited to a general comprehension of Poe's principles, but that he had penetrated deeply into the analysis of his commentaries. She goes on to stress the following important points which are relevant to

"Narcisse parle."

> On se souvient que pour la composition du Corbeau, Poe dit avoir essayé de fixer au préalable trois qualités essentielles: d'abord, la longueur, tout poème, selon lui, n'existant que s'il est court. Ensuite, il s'applique à determiner la 'province' la région psychique où il va situer son oeuvre, et enfin le ton. La 'province' étant trouvée, et c'est celle de la beauté, le ton le mieux approprié pour lui convenir sera celui de la tristesse, tristesse, qui nulle part ne s'exprime plus que par l'idée de la mort. Voilà donc posés les éléments préalables selon lesquels le poème vivra et se déroulera; ils enferment en eux la clé nerveuse dans laquelle tout le morceau va s'inscrire pour se communiquer aux autres et agir sur eux. Cette clé, c'est ce que Poe nomme the effect.[44]

Valéry's lectures at the Collège de France did not begin until 1937, but it is evident that Valéry took Poe's ideas seriously much earlier. Valéry strictly adhered to Poe's essential considerations in the composition of "Narcisse parle." The overall tone is extremely melancholy. The "province" is beauty. Symbols of beauty permeate the poem, and Narcissus himself is the archetype of beauty. Sadness is heightened by the references to death. In the poem, there is the underlying theme of the death of Narcissa, the young and beautiful daughter of the poet Young and the imminent death of Narcissus himself. In Poe's poetry, the death of a beautiful young girl is a cliché. Moreover, Valéry adheres to a general rule of Poe's that he will eschew later. The poem must be less than one hundred lines. This is true of the

early version published in La Conque which was fifty-three lines and the later version, also, which had fifty-eight lines. The insistence on this rule as well as the implications of Poe's idea of calculated effects is apparent in an excerpt from the following letter to Karl Boès, director of the Courrier libre, who published Valéry's early sonnet "Elevation de la lune." "Je suis partisan d'un poème court et concentré, une breve évocation close par un vers sonore et plein."[45] Poe's theory of the necessity of the calculated effect is clearly reiterated by Valéry in "Sur la technique littéraire."

> ... La littérature est l'art de se jouer de l'âme des autres. C'est avec cette brutalité scientifique que notre époque a vu poser le problème de l'esthétique du Verbe, c'est-à-dire le problème de la Forme.
>
> Etant donné une impression, un rêve, une pensée, if faut l'exprimer de telle manière, qu'on produise dans l'âme d'un auditeur le maximum d'effet- et un effet entièrement calculé par l'Artiste. (O, I, 1809).

Valéry discusses several other points in "Sur la technique littéraire" which attest to his serious attention to Poe's theory, including the importance of repetition and frequent alliteration. These technical aspects will be taken up later in the discussion of the variants of the poem where they become important. In addition, confidence in technique and the idea of a poet as a conscious craftsman are ideas of Poe that definitely coincided with Valéry's own ideas on the creative act.

That there is an overlapping and a combination of the theories of Poe and Mallarmé behind Valéry's "Narcisse parle" is apparent in Valéry's second letter to Mallarmé written when he sent the poem to him. Already in his first letter to Mallarmé, Valéry had indicated the role of Poe and the efficacy of the short poem in his own theory of poetry:

> Pour se faire en quelques mots connaître, il [Valéry] doit affirmer qu'il préfère les poèmes courts, concentrés pour un éclat final, où les rythmes sont comme les marches marmoréennes de l'autel que couronne le dernier vers! non qu'il puisse se vanter d'avoir réalisé cet idéal! Mais c'est qu'il est profondément pénétré des doctrines savantes du grand Edgar Allan Poe - peut-être le plus subtil artiste de ce siècle! Ce nom seul suffira à vous montrer de quelle sorte est sa Poétique.[46]

In the second letter to Mallarmé, Valéry adds the following on the subject of Poe:

> Une dévotion toute particulière à Edgar Poe me conduit alors à donner pour royaume au poète, l'analogie. Il précise l'écho mystérieux des choses, et leur secrète harmonie, aussi réelle, aussi certaine qu'un rapport mathématique à tous esprits artistes, c'est-à-dire, et comme il sied, idéalistes violents....[47]

That Valéry was also keenly aware of Mallarmé's theories and sincerely appreciated the perfection of his poems is obvious when he assigns to poetry the ability to explain the world and underscores the important role of music in poetry:

> La poésie m'apparaît comme une explication du Monde délicate et belle,

> contenue dans une musique singulière et continuelle. Tandis que l'Art métaphysique voit l'Univers construit d'idées pures et absolues, la peinture, de couleurs, l'art poétique sera de la considérer vêtue de syllabes, organisé en phrases.
>
> Considéré en sa splendeur nue et magique, le mot s'élève à la puissance élémentaire d'une note, d'une couleur, d'un claveau de voûte. Le vers se manifeste comme un accord permettant l'introduction des deux modes, où l'épithète mystérieuse et sacrée, miroir des souterraines suggestions, est comme un accompagnement prononcé en sourdine....
>
> Alors s'impose la conception suprême d'une haute symphonie, unissant le monde qui nous entoure au monde qui nous hante, construite selon une rigoureuse architechtonique, arrêtant des types simplifiés sur fond d'or et d'azur, et libérant le poète du pesant secours des banales philosophies, et des fausses tendresses, et des descriptions inanimées... (O, I, 1740).

In this letter, Valéry is explaining what he had hoped to suggest with his own poem "Narcisse parle:"

> Pour une seconde fois, je viens solliciter de vous un conseil, et connaître si quelques rêveries esthétiques accumulées cet hiver en province lointaine n'étaient pas aventureuses et illusoires.
>
> Un poème publié dans La Conque sous le titre "Narcisse parle" les a quelque peu indiquées, mais l'expérience comme souvent s'est jouée de la théorie, et me laisse immobile et perplexe (O, I, 1740).

He believes that Mallarmé alone has been able to reach the ideal: "L'après-midi du faune est seule en France à

réaliser cet idéal esthétique... (O, I, 1740). Guy Michaud, quite correctly, sees something of Mallarmé's faun in "Narcisse parle" but his emphasis is questionable in the light of the importance of "Hérodiade" which will be discussed later. Michaud remarks: "Si Valéry imite Mallarmé, c'est surtout le Mallarmé du Faune, le poète du Midi, des chaleurs capiteuses et de la volupté. Narcisse n'évoque-t-il pas le Faune, accompagné d'arabesques et de modulations sur la flûte?"[48]

Valéry's second letter to Mallarmé, which has been quoted here in some detail, was a summary of important aspects of Mallarmé's own theories about poetry and a fledgling poet's tribute to a master poet. At the time of "Narcisse parle" art is almost a religion for Valéry, and he shares Mallarmé's expectations for poetry as the means to an explanation of the world.[49] Other aspects of Mallarmé's theory and practice which impressed Valéry and reflected and enhanced his own thoughts and theories were the emphasis on highly polished traditional forms and the necessity for musicality, the use of difficult syntax, and unusual words often employed in their etymological sense. The whole idea of poetry as an exploration of and experiment on language appealed strongly to Valéry as well as Mallarmé's keen awareness of problems of technique and language as obstacles to be overcome.

In "Narcisse parle," in particular, there is a Mallarmean "élan vers la pureté," an attempt to paint not

the thing but the effect that it produces" and to suggest that the essence of things is behind the appearance. The choice of the theme of Narcissus dramatizes the rejection of the banal world and the demands of every day life.[50] The vocabulary of "Narcisse parle" including words like "funérale," "améthyste," "saphir," etc. echoes the cultivated, obscure, rarefied language used by Mallarmé in his work.[51]

As Mondor suggests, Valéry saw in Mallarmé what he felt the theories of Poe required.

> Ce que Baudelaire avait écrit d'Edgar Poe, lui éclairait, depuis un an, un ensorcelant idéal. Et voilà, désormais, que Mallarmé lui parassait remplir tout à fait les conditions peu communes énumérées par Poe: une vision impeccable du vrai, dût-elle être quelquefois impitoyable, une si exquise délicatesse des sens qu'une note fausse les dût torturer, la finesse infaillible du goût, enfin un amour du Beau poussé jusqu'à la passion tyrannique.
>
> Valéry, à vingt ans, venait de se découvrir le maître attendu. A l'opposé de ceux qui croient, au moment d'écrire, "à leur frénésie subtile ou à leur intuition extatique" lui aussi ne se satisfaisait qu'après d'inexorables ratures et cent ébauches et rebuts. Il trouvait, dans les scrupules, les reprises et la plus lucide sévérité, l'heureuse promesse de se surpasser. En ces exigences harassantes, le disciple enthousiaste découvrait, sans risque d'erreur, le meilleur de soi.[52]

The entire scope of the Mallarmé/Valéry relationship can not be detailed here where the prime concern is "Narcisse parle." A helpful introduction to this

complicated matter is Mondor's L'Heureuse Rencontre de Valéry et Mallarmé.[53] However difficult it is to adequately explain the range of Mallarmé's real influence on Valéry and his work, given, among other things, Valéry's contradictory statements on this matter,[54] it is clear, nevertheless, that the early Valéry was deeply moved and even tremendously awed by Mallarmé's poetry, especially "Hérodiade." Having been introduced to about eight lines of it in A Rebours,[55] he avidly and impatiently sought more of it.

> Vous êtes bien fortuné de posséder Mallarmé. Moi je grapille ses poèmes un peu partout. Quant à Hérodiade, je la recherche depuis deux années en vain et je désespère de la lire. Quel ennui que la province![56]

Louÿs then sent him the section beginning "Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi que je fleuris, déserte . . . " to "Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant." (A little over thirty lines.) Valéry discusses his overall impression of these lines in a letter to Gustave Fourment:

> Ces poèmes me font toujours songer à ces perles que les poules dédaignaient! ... Ce qui fait leur splendeur smaragdine, leur perfection et leur attirance de gemmes, c'est qu'ils sont en même temps comme elles, polis et brillants et pourtant sans fond, insondables, avec des dessous mystérieux de rêves, de correspondances. Il y a sous ces vers des étages d'associations d'idées, des évocation multiples- le tout sous une apparence dure et luisante, obscure pour qui cherche avec son raisonnement au lieu de trouver avec sa rêverie! La difficulté vaincue est immense, étreindre aussi étroitement des

> visions confusément tristes, conserver sous le vêtement précis et lumineux le vague nécessaire pour que l'apparition puisse y circuler c'est énorme! énorme![57]

Finally, Gide sent him more of the poem. Valéry was overwhelmed and even more pointedly ashamed of his own work. Referring to his Narcissus once again he wrote:

> Hérodiade m'hallucine, la glauque Hérodiade en l'or sinistre des flammes de ses cheveux, vêtue comme d'un triste et brûlant faste qui embrase les miroirs. Et je souffre, je saigne de pitié d' avoir dans ce tiroir tant de stances indigentes et ce déplorable Narcisse. N' avoir pas fait ces vers et faire des vers! Et ce poème suprême m'oppresse comme un remords![58]

It is known then that Valéry had access to at least some fragments of Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" when he wrote "Narcisse parle" (probably two fragments, about thirty-eight or forty lines in all). The cold bejeweled Hérodiade who blossoms for herself in an amethyste garden ("Oui, c'est pour moi, pour moi que je fleuris, déserte!/ Vous le savez, jardins d'améthyste . . . ")[59] seems to have some obvious echoes in "Narcisse parle." There is not only the choice of the theme of Narcissus before the mirror but the adoption of a vocabulary resplendant with words like "saphirs," "améthystes," "or," "gemme," "cristal," "glacé," and heavy with words like "meurs," "nu" and "nudité." Lines like "Je t'adore, sous ces myrtes, ô l'incertain/ Chair pour la solitude éclose tristement/ Qui se mire dans le miroir au bois dormant," (where "éclose" is a part of a series of flower and perfume images

including "calices" and "délices" also found in "Hérodiade") are not unlike: "Et tout, atour de moi, vit dans l'idolâtrie/ D'un miroir qui reflète en son calme dormant/ Hérodiade au clair regard de diamant . . . ."[60]

Mondor, in fact, sees the eight lines first read by Valéry in A Rebours as the probable source of the poem:

> Sept ou huit vers d'Hérodiade, cités dans son livre par Huysmans, s'étaient aussitôt imposés à le mémoire de Paul Valéry et lui étaient devenus, pour longtemps, leçon élective, doux enlèvement de l'âme. Se murmurer ce court monologue l'enivrait immanquablement et le thème de Narcisse, peut-être, s' insinua en son esprit grâce à ces même vers.[61]

He is referring to the lines from ". . . O miroir!/ Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée" to "J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!" One of Gide's criticisms of "Narcisse parle" is directed at just this aspect of the poem: "'Ainsi, dans les roseaux harmonieux jeté' sent un peu trop Hérodiade au miroir - soit dit en passant."[62]

There can be no doubt that Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" affected the Valéry of the period of "Narcisse parle." To sum up the overall impression which Mallarmé's work made on him in this early period, Valéry's own words on the subject are a revealing testament:

> Il me souvient comme je me suis presque détaché d'Hugo et de Baudelaire à dix-neuf ans, quand le sort sous les yeux me mit quelques fragments d'Hérodiade; et Les Fleurs, et Le Cygne. Je connaissais enfin la beauté sans prétextes, que j'attendais sans le savoir. Tout,

> ici, ne reposait que sur la vertu enchanteresse du langage.
>
> Je suis parti vers la mer assez éloignée, tenant les copies si précieuses que je venais de recevoir; et le soleil dans toute sa force, la route éblouissante, et ni l'azur, ni l'encens des plantes brulantes ne m'étaient rien, tant ces vers inouïs m'exerçaient et me possédaient au plus vivant de moi.[63]

Gide is the fourth and last figure to be studied here as a force behind Valéry's "Narcisse parle." A brief discussion of the relationship between Gide and Valéry is necessary to round out the influence factor so crucial to an understanding of Valéry in this early formative period.[64] The point of contact between Gide and Valéry's "Narcisse parle" is not merely the criticism related to "Hérodiade" alluded to above; yet there may be little or even no actual internal evidence in "Narcisse parle" which can be traced directly to Gide.[65] On the other hand, a number of factors are relevant in at least an external way. At the time of "Narcisse parle" the friendship between Gide and Valéry, which was in its first stages, seems to converge at two main points: Mallarmé and the theme of Narcissus. As pointed out earlier, Gide generously copied long excerpts from Mallarmé's work to send to Valéry who otherwise would not have had access to them. When Valéry was undergoing the influence of Mallarmé, Gide was, too.

> Depuis, tout est changé, Mallarmé surtout en est cause. Il me semble en l'aimant que je n'avais encore jamais

> aimé ni admiré: c'est de moi en lui une fusion éperdue. Il a fait tout les vers que j'aurais rêvé de faire.[66]

Flourishing in the same literary climate,[67] both wrote, at approximately the same time, a work about Narcissus reflecting, in their own way, the prevailing literary movement - Symbolism. Gide's prose work, which he dedicated to Valéry,[68] is entitled "Traité du Narcisse" and has the subtitle "Théorie du symbole."[69]

As dissimilar as the two works are, it is probable that both had the same point of origin. Gide and Valéry conversed seriously in the botanical garden at Montpellier which Valéry cites as the origin of his "Narcisse parle." Gide mentions this very place in his "Les Nourritures terrestres" as J. J. Thierry points out in notes which accompany the Pléiade edition of "Le Traité du Narcisse."

> C'est à Montpellier, où Gide était allé rejoindre son oncle Charles, que la légende de Narcisse leur inspira, à Paul Valéry qu'il y avait rencontré, et à lui-même, deux de leurs plus purs chefs-d'oeuvre. Le Jardin botanique de la cité servit de cadre à des entretiens qu'une entière communauté de vues disposait en faveur du mythe. Gide a fait allusion, dans ses Nouritures terrestres, à ce dialogue: 'A Montpellier, le Jardin botanique. [. . .] Je me souviens qu'avec Ambroise (Paul Valéry), un soir comme aux jardins d'Academus, nous nous assîmes sur une tombe ancienne, qui est tout entourée de cyprès; et nous causions lentement en mâchant des pétales de roses....'[70]

The Gide/Valéry correspondence indicates that Gide finished his Traité months after Valéry had finished

"Narcisse parle" for La Conque. In fact, if the dates are correct in Lettres à quelques-uns, Valéry had actually sent Louÿs the version for La Conque in November but did not meet Gide until December. On the other hand, the letters dated by Gide (since Valéry rarely dated letters) in the Gide/Valéry correspondence give the impression that Valéry was still working on the poem in February. It was published in March but to further complicate the problem of dates, Valéry says in "Sur les 'Narcisse:'"

> Au moment de composer le premier numéro il me demanda d'urgence un poème. J'écrivis en deux jours le morceau intitulé Narcisse parle, développement du sonnet dont il vient d'être question. Mais, la revue ne parut que six mois après. J'aurais préféré avoir le temps de travailler ce thème (p. 284).

Based on a letter from Gide to Valéry on the 23rd of June 1891, Thierry speaks of the indirect influence of Valéry on Gide's Traité.

> D'autre part, la Correspondance Gide-Valéry révèle de précieux indices sur l'écriture du Narcisse, et sur l'influence indirecte exercée par Valéry: "... J'élabore doucement le Traité du Narcisse, dont je vous ai vaguement parlé et que sans vos paroles des soirs, je n'eusse peut-être pas écrit - ou pas vu tel tout au moins.[71]

When it was finished, Gide sent his Narcisse to Valéry just as Valéry had sent "Narcisse parle" to him, but the letters suggest that Valéry's written commentary on the work was practically non-existent.[72] Gide, on the other hand, seems to have studied Valéry's poem quite diligently.

Valéry had rather urgently requested his opinion of the work.[73] His remarks on the poem appear in a long letter to Valéry dated March 1, 1891, referred to briefly already in connection with Mallarmé's Hérodiade. While there appears to be no concrete evidence that either author directly influenced the other's Narcisse, it seems probable that Gide stimulated a few of the changes which Valéry made in the new version for the Album de vers anciens. Looking closely at the two versions of the poem, it is possible to get some idea of Valéry's reaction to Gide's criticism of the work.

The version Gide discusses was quoted earlier in its entirety. Individual lines will be repeated here as they are compared and contrasted with the new version. The entire new version will be quoted when the analysis of the two versions has been completed.

Gide begins his critique of "Narcisse parle" by intimating that he has read the poem many times. He states that he likes it but with reservations.

> Et maintenant parlons d'autres choses: je relis pour la ?ème fois votre Narcisse: il me faut vous avouer que je ne l'aime pas sans restrictions comme certaines autres de vos pièces, peut-être parce qu'un tel sujet traité par vous promettait de plus lentes délices et que certains vers exquis rappelaient ces promesses et faisaient déplorer leur esseulement dans cette pièce . . . .[74]

Gide feels that the following lines from the poem are exquisite:

> J'entends les herbes d'or grandir dans l'ombre
> sainte
> ...Si la fontaine claire est par la nuit éteinte -
> Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent - [75]

and then he says, "et bien d'autres - et surtout le quatrain:

> Adieu! reflet perdu sous l'onde calme et close.
> Narcisse, l'heure ultime est un tendre parfum
> Au coeur suave. Effeuille aux mânes du défunt
> Sur ce glaque tombeau la funérale rose.

Cela est parfait: il me plaît de les écrire encore et la perfection de ceux-ci m'encourage aux critiques adjacentes...."[76]

The lines Gide likes will be discussed first. Of the lines mentioned above by Gide as exquisite, "J' entends les herbes d'or grandir dans l'ombre sainte" has received considerable scholarly attention, probably more than any other line in the whole poem.

In an article entitled "Formules valéryennes," Jean Hytier discusses the possible source or sources for the basic idea expressed. He notes that the idea appears in Racan and Malherbe and also finds its expression in Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Wordsworth and Poe, among others. In Poe, for example, he quotes the lines from "Al Aaraaf" (Part II): "The murmur that springs/ From the growing of grass." Hytier concludes, however, that Valéry probably got the idea from Chateaubriand, specifically chapter 13 on the "fête des Rogations" in Le Génie du Christianisme.

He quotes the following:

> On croit entendre de toutes parts les blés germer dans la terre et les plantes croître et se développer; des voix inconnues s'élèvent dans le silence des bois, comme le choeur des anges champêtres dont on a imploré le secours, et les soupirs du rossignol parviennent à l'oreille des vieillards assis non loin des tombeaux.[77]

From the first version to the second, Valéry changes the line Gide liked so much only slightly from "J'entends les herbes d'or grandir dans l'ombre sainte" to "J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte."

Paul Pieltain, who admires the line as intensely as Gide does, discusses the significance of the change in an article devoted almost entirely to this one line and its variants. Of the change from gold to silver, he says:

> Mais cette correction, inspirée soit par un souci de justesse (la nuit tombe et la lune commence de luire), soit par le désir de substituer à un mot - plus qu'à une couleur - trop cher au Valéry 'symboliste' un terme moins voyant, commandait que le nom fût mis au singulier; ainsi, les herbes d'or, qui pouvaient tout aussi bien évoquer les blés - ou encore de grandes herbes sauvages où s'attarderait le soleil -, font place à l'herbe d'argent, plus vague et déjà plus mystérieuse.[78]

As Pieltain points out more specifically later (p. 36), the change from gold to silver is more in keeping with the rising moonlight. It also gives the passage the silvery tint of Ovid's setting. The line is a subtle way

of conveying the approach of night and the rising of the moon which is casting its silvery hue in lengthening shadows as it moves across the grass and towards the water where it will ultimately replace the image of Narcissus. The line undergoes another change and reaches its final form in the "Fragments du Narcisse" where it becomes: "J'entends l'herbe des nuits croître dans l'ombre sainte."

The second line Gide mentions: "Si la fontaine claire est par la nuit éteinte," Valéry omits almost completely in the new version. Rather than an outright rejection of Gide's taste and appreciation, however, the near total omission and change to: "Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte" may be connected with the problem of lighting which Gide brings up later in his letter:

> Pour en revenir au Narcisse, vous dirais-je encore que je regrette trop de diversité d'impressions, ou mieux de lumières; cela manque un peu d'unité d'éclairage et l'on ne sait plus très bien, par suite d'une absence des ombres, d'ou vient le jour, la nocturne clarté: de cette atmosphère un peu trop égale (prenez cela la plus symboliquement possible, ou ne le prenez pas du tout) résulte une apparence un peu fragmentaire; chaque vision paraît brève et module avant de s'être mélodieusement éployée; avec ce nombre de vers, vous auriez pu, il me semble, évoquer de plus lentes images. J'ai peur que vous ne vous soyez un peu pressé pour l'écrire et si cela était, il vous faudrait prendre le courage de le refaire, la pièce en vaut le peine [. . .].[79]

Although Valéry did not completely change the lighting in the poem, it is obvious that he made some corrections which while they may not speak directly to Gide's criticism, nevertheless, do enhance and improve the poem. So that the poem would have a chiaroscuro effect, Valéry at first, may have been trying to emphasize openly the antithesis, clair/obscur, for example, in such lines as: "Car les hymnes du soleil s'en vont!../C'est le soir," and "Si la fontaine claire est par la nuit éteinte." Since in Valéry's poem, it is not merely or actually the darkness which is the threat but rather the moonlight itself which obliterates Narcissus' mirror reflection, the problem is complicated. In the light of Gide's criticism, Valéry may have decided to try a different approach to the essentially three-pronged problem of the ending of daylight, the coming of night and the obscuring of the image by the moonlight. By completely omitting the line about the sun, greatly changing the line Gide so admired,[80] and by toning down or dimming other references to light as in the change from "Une lumière ondule encor, pâle améthyste" to "Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe,"[81] there is not a continuous sharp, almost unnatural, contrasting of light and dark. The new approach is more subtle and more logical since it marks the change from waning day to twilight to full moonrise in a more gradual and natural way. The reader is just as keenly aware of

the approaching night, however, and the impending doom caused by the rising moon. Not mentioning the sun at all can make its absence felt more strongly and reminds us of Mallarmé's use of absence.

In addition to omitting the line about the sun, the change from "or" to "argent" in the line already discussed ("J'entends l'herbe . . . .") is a corresponding corrective change in lighting. The grass touched by the color "or" reminds the reader of the sunlight; colored instead by "argent" the approaching moonlight is emphasized.

Much later in the poem the change to "Car la nuit parle à demi-voix, proche et lointaine," from "Car la Nuit parle à demi-voix seule et lointaine" is a logical improvement since the night is no longer something off in the distance, it has come much closer. Although the calices are full of shadows, there is a brief respite while the moon is still behind the trees. "Car la nuit parle à demi-voix, proche et lointaine,/ Aux calices pleins d' ombres et de sommeils légers,/ Mais la lune s'amuse aux myrtes allongés." This will not last. It is a lie. "L'heure menteuse est molle aux membres sur la mousse." Finally, "Adieu, Narcisse...Meurs! Voici le crépuscule." The moon is now mirrored in the water. A kiss is placed on the "dead image" of Narcissus which the fog or mist will soon bury in complete darkness.

> Mais sur le froid mortel où l'étoile s'allume,
> Avant qu'un lent tombeau ne se forme de brume,
> Tiens ce baiser qui brise un calme d'eau fatal!

Valéry has achieved a unity of lighting, answering, at least in a general way, Gide's main criticism.

"Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent" is the third line which Gide praises. Valéry not only does not change it for the Album, it is also one of a small number of lines that he uses again for the later Narcissus poem, "Fragments du Narcisse," suggesting that he, too, thought it was a good line.

One might question the use of "or" here immediately after the line with silver - "Voici mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont purs!.." Its effectiveness in terms of sound can not be questioned since the "or" repeated in "adorable" is harmonious. Also, "or" here seems to have a value signification primarily, rather than a color or lighting importance; that is, the metaphor for water is gold because the image is so sought after and treasured. Its use does not seem to be related to the lighting problem previously discussed and besides the moonlight has not yet reached the water at this point.

Concerning the quatrain which Gide singles out as perfect, Valéry makes, in effect, only minor changes. It becomes:

> Adieu, reflet perdu sur l'onde calme et close,
> Narcisse...ce nom même est un tendre parfum
> Au coeur suave. Effeuille aux mânes du défunt
> Sur ce vide tombeau la funérale rose.

In the last line, there is the loss of the Mallarmean "glauque"[82] which is changed to "vide." "Vide tombeau" is more suggestive, in this case than "glauque tombeau," allowing for a double interpretation of the line. The image reminds us that this is a lucid Narcissus who knows that his image on the water, the "vide tombeau" is empty, so to speak, that his pursuit of it is in vain; but the "vide tombeau" also refers to the empty tomb of Narcissa which would be less apparent with the watery colored adjective "glauque."

In addition to this fairly minor substitution, the second line of the quatrain is changed only slightly but quite dramatically from "Narcisse, l'heure ultime est un tendre parfum" to "Narcisse...ce nom même est un tendre parfum." This is part of a general trend, similar to the lighting improvements, to tighten up aspects of the poem to achieve greater unity. The new line is now linked by its connotations with a series of flower and scent images which run like a leitmotif through the poem hinting at Narcissus' transformation into a flower. The juxtaposition of the adjectives "tendre" and "suave," which would more normally be written tender heart and sweet perfume, is a felicitous chiasmus uniting the Narcissus who looks at himself in the reflecting pool with the image of the flower he will become.

The next line to which Gide refers is the line alluded to previously: "'Ainsi, dans les roseaux harmonieux

jeté' sent un peu trop Hérodiade au miroir - soit dit en passant."[83] Valéry changes the line slightly to "Et moi! De tout mon coeur dans ces roseaux jeté." This seems to be part of an overall increase of first person references made throughout the new version. This type of change has been observed by Whiting who sees it as an attempt to correct a weakness of emotion which he finds in the early version.[84]

Gide's most serious criticism seems to be leveled at the line: "Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur" which he finds beneath Valéry.[85] Valéry, trusting his own poetic judgment over Gide's in this case, not only does not change this line, he uses it again, intact, in the 'Fragments du Narcisse." There may be a special reason for the retention of this particular line which is used not only in the version for La Conque, the Album and the "Fragments," but is, also, the first line of the three original sonnets. Could it be that this is the "vers donné," the one given line on which Valéry must build the rest?[86] Acknowledgement of the occasional free line given by the Muses is one of a few, small concessions to inspiration which are found in Valéry's poetics.

> Les dieux, gracieusement, nous donnent pour rien tel premier vers; mais c'est à nous de façonner le second, qui doit consonner avec l'autre, et ne pas être indigne de son aîné surnaturel. Ce n'est pas trop de toutes les ressources de l'expérience et de l'esprit pour le rendre comparable au vers qui fut un don.[87]

In addition to the possible influence of Gide on certain aspects of the second version of "Narcisse parle," there are broader and more important questions posed by the two main versions of the poem. Besides the lines already studied, what else did Valéry change and why? What do these changes or lack of changes reveal about his theory of poetry?

Only eighteen of the original fifty-three lines were reused unchanged by Valéry for the revised version of "Narcisse parle." If punctuation changes are also taken into account, then only eight of the original fifty-three are absolutely the same in the 1920 version as they were in the 1890 version. The only lines which did not change in any way at all were:

> Et la lune perfide élève son miroir
>
> Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur
>
> Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur
>
> Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent
> D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent,
>
> Au coeur suave. Effeuille aux mânes du défunt
>
> Mais la lune s'amuse aux myrtes allongés.
>
> Chair pour la solitude éclose tristement

If the record is correct, however, the poem recited by Valéry in 1941 during his lecture "Sur les 'Narcisse'" was the new version. It appears that Valéry felt that the new version was not significantly different from the old one overall because immediately after he

finished reciting the poem, he said:

> A cinquante ans de distance, ce premier Narcisse me paraît aujourd'hui un spécimen de ce que j'aurais probablement fait en matière de poésie si'j'avais continué à la pratiquer au lieu de m'en écarter et de poursuivre dans de toutes autres voies la formation de mon esprit. Ce poème demeure pour moi un premier état caractéristique de mon idéal et de mes moyens de ce temps-là (p. 287).

Out of fifty-three lines, however, considerably more than one-half were modified. About twenty lines were changed completely. Approximately fifteen were partially altered. In addition, five completely new lines were added so that the total number of lines in the new version was fifty-eight not fifty-three. Nevertheless, Walzer does not feel that there is a major difference between the two versions either:

> Mais enfin, malgré ces heureuses révisions, malgré les transformations apportées à la conclusion et les cinq vers ajoutés à la version définitive, le texte de l'Album ne diffère pas essentiellement ni par le propos ni par la forme, du texte donné par la Conque.[88]

The new version may not be a different poem, but it is a thorough modification of the old version and a definite improvement. The Album version has more unity. It is clearer and flows more logically than the old one. Networks of images such as those of light and flowers, already referred to, are much more tightly organized. The once very subliminal theme of poetry is subtly amplified. A sharpening of certain poetic techniques is

noticeable. There is an increase in alliteration. Harmonious words and sound repetitions are made, expanding greatly the internal rhyme. In addition, more effective use of enjambement can be observed, for example,

> Et d'un reste du jour me forme un fiancé
> Nu, sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste... [89]

Moreover, the poem is made more personal, less an abstract meditation, by the proliferation of first person pronoun references. Still another modification involves the lapidary vocabulary. It is not so excessive.

The new version of the poem, as an early example of Valéry's return to poetry, shows the painstaking efforts of a more conscious and less rushed artist, even more keenly interested in technique and poetic effect than he had been earlier, trying new solutions and substitutions for poetic problems.

Specific examples of some of the more significant changes mentioned above follow, demonstrating Valéry's serious, but often subtle, attempts to improve the poem.

The changes made were as minor as the modifications in line three from: "Et, vers vous, Nymphes! nymphes, nymphes des fontaines" to "Et vers vous, Nymphe, Nymphe, ô Nymphe des fontaines," or as dramatic as the substitution of a completely new line like: "Je me délie en vain de ta présence douce," for "O chair d'adolescent et de princesse douce!" The new line is an example of the increase in first person usage and an

attempt to amplify sound harmony and repetition since "vain" is now repeated in the poem three times and "délie" blends effectively with "délice" which appears two lines later in "Et d'un sombre délice enfle le vent profond." The complete omission of the old line with its possible androgynous reference reduces the ambiguity of the poem, perhaps to its detriment.

Increased alliteration can be seen in the following changes where lines numbered 1 will refer to the early version and lines numbered 2 will refer to the new version.

1 A travers ces bois bleus et ces lys fraternels
2 A travers les bois bleus et les bras fraternels,

1 Pâle améthyste! ô miroir du songe insensé!
completely replaced by
2 Délicieux démon, désirable et glacé![90]

1 L'heure menteuse est molle au rêve sur la mousse
2 L'heure menteuse est molle au membres sur la mousse

Increased alliterative sounds also appear in:

2 L'espoir seul peut suffire à rompre ce cristal.

where the "s" sounds imitate the whispering sigh which will ripple the water. The line had been harsher sounding:

1 Caresse dont l'espoir ondule ce crystal!

There are several additional examples of alliteration where only two words are involved; for example,

2 Nu, sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste...

and:

1 Tiens ce baiser nocturne et tendrement fatal,
2 Tiens ce baiser qui brise un calme d'eau fatal!

1 Assez pour deviner là-bas le Fiancé
2 Et d'un reste du jour me forme un fiancé

Further technical improvements are found, such as augmented internal rhyme and clever word repetitions which echo again and again as the poem develops. The echo can be as simple as the repetition of the end sound of "ravisse" duplicated three lines later in "Evanouissez" or as sustained as the sound of the word "eau" repeated four times as the word "eau" but reverberating also in words like "beauté" (twice), "tombeau" (twice), "tropeaux" roseaux,"[91] "échos," not to mention the many "o's" as in "O frères . . . ." But the repetition of sounds and words (as Poe prescribed) are too numerous to detail here. A few more will be mentioned as they occur in lines cited for other reasons.

Another fairly striking aspect of the new version is a marked movement away from "les trésors du langage des lapidaires."

1 Saphir antique et fontaine magicienne
2 Je ne sais plus aimer que l'eau magicienne

1 Une lumière ondule encore, pale améthyste
2 Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe,[92]

1 Pale améthyste! o miroir du songe insensé!
2 Délicieux démon, désirable et glacé![93]

1 Sur la lèvre de gemme en l'eau morte, ô pieuse
2 Mais sur le froid mortel où l'étoile s'allume,

The line which replaced "Saphir antique . . ." begins with "Je." A number of references have already been made to the fact that the poem was made to seem more

personal by just such an increase in the use of the first person. Related to this type of change are the personal and possessive pronouns in the new lines which Valéry added to the poem.

2 Au soupir de mon coeur mon apparence ondule,
2 La ride me ravisse au souffle qui m'exile
2 Et que mon souffle anime une flûte gracile
2 Dont le joueur léger me serait indulgent!...

Lighting improvements were discussed in the section on Gide, and flower images have been mentioned in several places. One more example of Valéry's ability to make an image more suggestive by means of a slight adjustment, with the result that it becomes more closely linked to the other flower and scent images, is the change from "Aux calices pleins d'ombre pâle et si légers," to "Aux calices pleins d'ombre et de sommeils légers." The new line is a subtle reminder of the soporific power of the Narcissus flower, thereby resulting in a further allusion to the metamorphosis of Narcissus.

Increased attention to imagery makes one of the underlying themes clearer too. The theme of poetic creation, once almost totally obscure, is greatly enhanced in the new version. The addition of "Et que mon souffle anime une flûte gracile/ Dont le joueur[94] léger me serait indulgent!..." plus the modification of "Et puis, verse pour la lune, flûte isolée,/ Verse des pleurs lointains

en des urnes d'argent," to "Et, toi, verse à la lune, humble flûte isolée,/ Une diversité de nos larmes d' argent," certainly increases the likelihood that the theme of poetry is meant to be suggested. The flute can be seen as the symbol of the voice of the poet pouring out his beautifully emotive lines reimmortalizing the tragic plight of Narcissus and the equally poetic story of Narcissa as well as lamenting the fugitiveness of beauty. The tears stand for poems. This equation can be made even in the earlier line: "Je viens au pur silence offrir mes larmes vaines."

Moreover, the addition of the lines "Un grand calme m'écoute, où j'écoute l'espoir/ La voix des sources change et me parle du soir;" for "Car les hymnes du soleil s'en vont!/ C'est le soir," may be related to Valéry's concept of "attente" and other aspects of the poetic process which he discusses in a complex passage in "Calepin d'un poète:"

> Ainsi le poète en fonction est une attente. Il est une modification dans un homme, - qui le fait sensible à certains termes de son propre développement: ceux qui récompensent cette attente pour être conformes à la convention. Il restitue ce qu'il désirait. Il restitue de quasi-mécanismes qui soient capables de lui rendre l'énergie qu'ils lui ont coûtée et même plus (car ici les principes sont en apparence violés). Son oreille lui parle.
>
> Nous attendons le mot inattendu et qui ne peut être prévu, mais attendu. Nous sommes le premier à l'entendre.

> Entendre? mais c'est parler. On ne comprend la chose entendue que si on l'a dite soi-même au moyen d'une cause autre.
>
> Parler, c'est entendre [. . .]
>
> Le silence et l'attention sont incompatibles. Il faut que le courant soit fermé.
>
> Créer donc l'espèce de silence à laquelle répond le beau. Ou le vers pur, ou l'idée lumineuse... (O, I, 1448-49)

The ideas expressed in the preceding passage are somewhat cryptic, but they seem to be rendered poetically by the four lines:

> Je viens au pur silence offrir mes larmes vaines.
>
> Un grand calme m'écoute, où j'écoute l'espoir.
> La voix des sources change et me parle du soir;
> J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte,

Narcissus, in a state of expectation analogous to "attente,"[95] has approached the kind of pure silence which speaks and to which the beautiful responds.

Obviously, not all of the many modifications made by Valéry in the second version have been elaborated upon here. Other categories of changes include numerous variations in punctuation, most of them fairly minor. One overall statement can be made about punctuation. There is definitely an increase in punctuation from the first to the second version. Generally speaking, this is a movement toward greater transparency. Being aware of one deletion, however, is helpful.

1 Je t'adore, sous ces myrtes, ô l'incertaine!
2 Je t'adore, sous ces myrtes, ô l'incertaine

The new version is syntactically more difficult but probably more suggestive as it now runs into the next line: "Chair pour la solitude éclose tristement." It is, therefore, not just "ô l'incertaine!" but "o l'incertaine Chair [qui est] pour la solitude éclose tristement."

Numerous preposition changes have also been made for the second version. None are so dramatic as the famous change in "Palme" where the new preposition gives the line a completely opposite meaning: "Départage avec mystère" became "Départage sans mystère." One slightly similar change:

1 Adieu! reflet perdu sous l'onde calme et close,
2 Adieu, reflet perdu sur l'onde calme et close,

One last relevant element of the poem needs to be examined. Epithets, considered essential by Valéry, are extremely common in both versions.[96] Many stay the same in both versions, such as, "triste lys," "larmes vaines," "lune perfide," "fleurs humides," "pleurs éternels," "coeur suave," etc. Some are lost: "roseaux harmonieux," "saphir antique," "pâle améthyste," "fontaine ironique," "heure ultime." New ones are added, for example, "froid mortel," "eau fatale," "flûte gracile," "pur silence," etc.

Once Valéry quoted Voltaire on the subject of poetry and agreed with him:

> Voltaire a dit merveilleusement bien que "la Poésie n'est faite que de beaux détails." Je ne dis autre chose. L'univers poétique dont je parlais s' introduit par le nombre ou, plutôt, par la densité des images, des figures, des consonances, dissonances, par l' enchaînement des tours et des rythmes [. . .] (O, I, 1502).

Valéry also said that there is no need to point out to women that beauty demands laborious assistance, exquisite care, and long consultations before the mirror and that likewise, the poet looks at his work on the page and retouches, here and there, the original face of his poem.[97] Here is the complete second version of "Narcisse parle," an improvement over the first and a testament to Valéry's determination concerning the necessity of revision and the beauty of details.

O FRERES! tristes lys, je languis de beauté[98]
Pour m'être désiré dans votre nudité,
Et vers vous, Nymphe, Nymphe, ô Nymphe des fontaines,
Je viens au pur silence offrir mes larmes vaines.

Un grand calme m'écoute, où j'écoute l'espoir.
La voix des sources change et me parle du soir;
J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte,
Et la lune perfide élève son miroir
Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte.

Et moi! De tout mon coeur dans ces roseaux jeté,
Je languis, ô saphir, par ma triste beauté!
Je ne sais plus aimer que l'eau magicienne
Où j'oubliai le rire et la rose ancienne.

Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur
Si mollement de moi fontaine environnée,
Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur
Mon image de fleurs humides couronnée!

Hélas! L'image est vaine et les pleurs éternels!
A travers les bois bleus et les bras fraternels,
Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe,
Et d'un reste du jour me forme un fiancé
Nu, sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste...
Délicieux démon, désirable et glacé!

Voici dans l'eau ma chair de lune et de rosée,
O forme obéissante à mes yeux opposée!
Voici mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont
purs!...
Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent
D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent,
Et je crie aux échos les noms des dieux obscurs!...

Adieu, reflet perdu sur l'onde calme et close,
Narcisse... ce nom même est un tendre parfum
Au coeur suave. Effeuille aux mânes du défunt
Sur ce vide tombeau la funérale rose.

Sois, ma lèvre, la rose effeuillant le baiser
Qui fasse un spectre cher lentement s'apaiser,
Car la nuit parle à demi-voix, proche et lointaine,
Aux calices pleins d'ombre et de sommeils légers.
Mais la lune s'amuse aux myrtes allongés.

Je t'adore, sous ces myrtes, ô l'incertaine
Chair pour la solitude éclose tristement
Qui se mire dans le miroir au bois dormant.
Je me délie en vain de ta présence douce,
L'heure menteuse est molle aux membres sur la
mousse
Et d'un sombre délice enfle le vent profond.

Adieu, Narcisse...Meurs! Voici le crépuscule.
Au soupir de mon coeur mon apparence ondule,
La flûte, par l'azur enseveli module
Des regrets de troupeaux sonores qui s'en vont.
Mais sur le froid mortel où l'étoile s'allume,
Avant qu'un lent tombeau ne se forme de brume,
Tiens ce baiser qui brise un calme d'eau fatal!
L'espoir seul peut suffire à rompre ce cristal.
La ride me ravisse au souffle qui m'exile
Et que mon souffle anime une flûte gracile
Dont le joueur léger me serait indulgent!...

Evanouissez-vous, divinité troublée!
Et, toi, verse à la lune, humble flûte isolée.
Une diversité de nos larmes d'argent (O, I, 82-83).

Taking "Narcisse parle" apart and looking quite

carefully at both versions has demonstrated its richness and underscored a number of Valéry's technical preoccupations. Now that the poem has been put back together in its revised form, it is necessary to make some observations about it as a whole.

While "Narcisse parle" has often been recognized as, at least, a minor masterpiece and as a representative example of Valéry's early poetry, even by Valéry himself, it has not often been analyzed in detail. Charles Whiting does one of the few fairly detailed studies of the poem, a chapter in his book length study of the early versions of the poems of the Album de vers anciens. Although he concentrates primarily on the early form of the poem, nevertheless, it is interesting to see how he looks at the poem and what he understands it to mean.

Whiting studies the poem from the point of view of the theme of purity which he sees as an underlying theme of the early poems. He says of "Narcisse parle:"

> L'importance de Narcisse parle est de montrer que cette pureté se trouve en soi et que la grande affaire est de l'appréhender en soi-même [...]. Valéry était trop conscient de ses défauts pour s'interesser ici à lui-même, tel quel. Il préférait distinguer cette petite partie de lui-même qui était le "Dieu." En outre, cette conscience aigue de ses propres défauts semble expliquer aussi pouquoi Narcisse parle est plus une lamentation qu'une recherche active de la pureté. Le point est important, car il éclaire tout le poème, et à travers le poème un aspect

> de la jeunesse de Valéry. Dans Narcisse parle, Narcisse a, en effet, abandonné la recherche de son image. Il est sans espoir (ainsi les "larmes vaines" du début) et il ne fait que languir. L'épigraphe - pour apaiser les mânes de Narcisse - l'atteste. Narcisse est venu se lamenter devant le tombeau de son idéal.[99]

He finds the explanation for the attitude expressed in the poem in Valéry's personal life and letters. He sees in the poem the expression of a moment of despair and supports his thesis by quoting a portion of a letter to Gide which he says was written less than fifteen days before Valéry wrote the poem:

> . . . Je languis auprès du feu en attendant ce qui ne viendra pas. Heureusement les journées s'ecoulent.
>
> Les projets, des fois, s' illuminent dans l'obscurité de mon ennui, comme des palais enchantés. J' entends mes vers chanter et luire sans pouvoir les saisir et les garder... Ils s'envolent! Les palais s'écroulent, et je languis encore auprès du feu, mortellemnt.[100]

On the other hand, Pierre Michel, who analyzes the poem in Valéry, L'Ecrivain symboliste et hermétique, has a much more optimistic interpretation of the poem. He says: "Dans l'Album, Narcisse est un bel éphèbe, frère des jeunes héros de Virgile et de Chénier, qui médite devant la fontaine. Il souffre de ne plus connaître les plaisirs de la vie, de l'amour, d'être devenue le prisonnier de la source."[101] He recognizes, as Whiting did, that this Narcissus knows that his efforts are in

vain but he adds:

> Mais cette peine n'est pas sans consolations: la nature et la poésie charment son existence vaine, l'une par la beauté de ses spectacles aux nuances subtiles, l'autre par ses plaisirs savants; de même que le Faune mallarméen goûtait dans la création poetique une joie plus intense que dans la possession physique, de même Narcisse s'enivre de sa mélodie et de sa beauté . . . .[102]

Concerning the ending, he feels that the twilight which puts an end to the enchantment is not hostile because it is accompanied by the song of the flute. Even the fog which will bury the image is not an ominous sign because it is not a true death since the next day "l'azur permettra une nouvelle contemplation . . . ."[103] Consequently, he concludes that the ending of the poem is optimistic.

> La conclusion de l'églogue, comme celle de l'Après-midi d'un faune, est donc optimiste: la poésie avec ses mélodies, ses correspondances, ses artifices savants, son langage secret, détourne Narcisse de l'action et de la passion; elle fait de lui un être à part, qui méprise le matérialisme de son époque et trouve, provisoirement, l'expression de son Moi dans la symphonie que consitue un poème.[104]

Whiting, who contends that the new ending is intellectual and cold,[105] feels that the early version conveyed the idea that Narcissus was consoled by the beauty of the evening.[106] While both studies are helpful on some points, the problem may be that they are trying to read too much into the poem. Even in the second version,

which is much more tightly organized than the first, there is a vagueness which permeates the poem. This seemingly intentional obscurity heightens the poem's evocative power and adds to its charm. The poem raises certain questions which probably can not be answered definitively but allow for alternate possible interpretations. For instance, has Narcissus already been transformed into a flower when the poem begins? The first words are: "O frères! tristes lys . . . ." And the possibility that Narcissus is indeed a flower holds until the fifth stanza where the word "chair" is mentioned. Even here, however, the impression can not completely be discounted since the "chair" is of moon and dew. The flower could be colored by moonlight and covered with dew just as well as the flesh of Narcissus could be. Ultimately, there is no need to determine for sure, just as it does not matter exactly why the flower mentioned is a lily and not the narcissus flower. Of course, the lily obviously blends harmoniously with the other symbols of purity and beauty representing the ideal. It probably is not even crucial that the reader see that the flute metaphor and related images suggest the theme of poetic creation. "Narcisse parle" is a vague, lovely impression, the expression of "un état d'âme" where beauty is envisioned, almost apprehended, and then it vanishes. The poem, written at the dawn of Valéry's poetic career, remains to suggest the ideal and perpetuate the mood.

To quote Valéry, the following, although stated in

another context in a slightly different form, describes "Narcisse parle" - "la méditation d'un certain moi, transportée dans l'univers poétique [. . .]" (O, I, p. 1505). The ambiguities in the poem are a reminder that the poem is not an attempt to tell a story, especially not the tale told by Ovid. Valéry felt that the more poetry could be reduced to prose, the less it was poetry. It is beauty and poetry that are important here. Valéry could have been talking about himself and some of his own aims and even "Narcisse parle" when he described the Symbolist period as follows:

> Un exposé des tentatives de cette époque demanderait un travail systématique. Rarement plus de ferveur, plus de hardiesse, plus de recherches théoriques, plus de savoir, plus de pieuse attention, plus de disputes ont été, en si peu d'années, consacrés au problème de la beauté pure (O, I, 1272).

He goes on to say that the problem of pure beauty was approached from all sides and that language being a complex thing, its many sided nature allowed for a diversity of attempts. "Narcisse parle" seems to be an expression of a combination of these methods:

> Certains, qui conservaient les formes traditionnelles du Vers français, s' étudiaient à éliminer les descriptions, les sentences, les moralités, les précisions arbitraires; ils purgeaient leur poésie de presque tous ces éléments intellectuels que la musique ne peut exprimer. D'autres donnaient à tous les objets des significations infinies qui supposaient une métaphysique cachée. Ils usaient d'un délicieux matériel

> ambigu. Ils peuplaient leurs parcs enchantés et leurs sylves évanescentes d'une faune tout idéale. Chaque chose était allusion; rien ne se bornait à être; tout pensait, dans ces royaumes ornés de miroirs; ou, du moins, tout semblait penser... (O, I, 1272-73).

In the final analysis Valéry will emerge as his own man, an original and independent thinker and poet, but during this early formative period when "Narcisse parle" was written, Valéry was subject to outside influences. As a result, "Narcisse parle" can be labeled, as it has been in this study, a Symbolist poem.

With "Narcisse parle," Valéry rejected the Narcissus myth as told by Ovid. His poem does not reflect the preoccupations of the Middle Ages vis-à-vis the Narcissus myth either, because it is not didactic. There is no moralizing in Valéry's poem; there are no warnings, no mention of the "vanitas" theme and no development of the crime and punishment motif so common in the poems which mention Narcissus during the Middle Ages. Although Valéry's "Narcisse parle" does not make use of traditional aspects of the Narcissus myth, it is, paradoxically, the least original of his Narcissus works. The reason for this is that it is schooled in Symbolism - in the way it utilizes the Narcissus myth, in vocabulary, in setting, and in general aims.

While Valéry's poem does not seem to have Creuzer's sense of: Narcissus as a symbol which in a mystic way

reveals the fate of the human soul as the prisoner of matter, deceived by a beautiful illusion,[107] there is something in "Narcisse parle" of Michaud's concept of the Symbolist poem haunted by the myth of Narcissus ". . . moins par une introversion complaisante que pour tenter de saisir et de fixer, au delà des formes fugitives leur propre essence."[108]

The inclusion of the suggestion of the theme of poetic creation also helps to place the poem squarely in the symbolist tradition. Narcissus, in this period, is seen as a symbol of the creative artist. He is also seen as the symbol of self-awareness. Valéry's Narcissus in "Narcisse parle," however, does not seem to be engaged in a serious "connaisance de soi" attempt, but is instead an archetype of beauty, meditating in a landscape beyond reality and lamenting the fugitiveness of ideal beauty; consequently, he is a typical symbolist hero.

Tied in with the Symbolist/decadent milieu and Valéry and "Narcisse parle" are the four important literary figures discussed in detail in this study: Gide, Huysmans, Mallarmé and Poe. While the influence of Gide and Huysmans must not be discounted, more important is the clear debt Valéry owes to Mallarmé and Poe during this early period. Having established already that "Narcisse parle" was definitely modeled on the poems and poetic aims of Mallarmé and the techniques and theories of Poe, the question of their influence can be resolved further and put

into a larger perspective by focusing on the insight which Mallarmé and Poe offered Valéry into the workings of the mind. Valéry touched on this specifically when he said:

> Il est exact, - et presque mieux qu'exact, - que Léonard, que Poe, que Mallarmé ont fortement agi sur moi à l'âge où se fixent, en général, l'objet, le champ, les conditions de notre volonté d'action intérieure. Les oeuvres de ces hommes m'ont séduit, dominé, et,- comme il convient, - désespéré: le beau est ce qui désespère. Mais leur prise sur moi fut moins celle de leurs productions même que de l'idée qu'elles m'imposaient de leurs auteurs. J'imaginais des esprits, ce qui me conduisait à imaginer l'esprit, à quoi j'ai dépensé le meilleur de mon temps [. . .]. En vérité, une oeuvre qui m'intéresse profondément est une oeuvre qui m' excite à me figurer le système vivant et pensant qui l'a produite (O, II, 1537).

Ultimately, Valéry viewed the whole range of his preoccupations, even as they related to poetry, in terms of his main concern: the study of the mind. Valéry discovered that looking outward at others and their works was just another means of looking inward in order to understand the workings and problems of the mind, his own above all. This attitude towards the influence and insight provided him by the study of seminal minds like Mallarmé's and Poe's is an extension of his own brand of introspective Narcissism which can not help but make us more aware that the Narcissus myth as Valéry used it has the function of a

catalyst structuring his whole life and work. It is not surprising, therefore, that Valéry saw his Narcissus works as a kind of "autobiographie poétique."

"Narcisse parle" is a representative example of Valéry's early work, the reflection of a particular period and even a specific school of poetry, and, as Valéry himself indicated, the poem closest to his ideal from this early period. It constitutes the first chapter in Valéry's "autobiographie poétique." From its early sonnet forms through its publication in La Conque, and its revision for the Album, "Narcisse parle" reveals Valéry's poetic preoccupations and the tenets of his poetic theory.

Although the famous crisis night of October or November 1892 was the climax, the publication of "Narcisse parle" in 1891 and Valéry's disappointment with it and other aspects of poetry, were a turning point for Valéry, the emerging poet, leading to an outward renunciation of poetry[109] and a more definite and determined turn to the study of the processes of thought. Valéry did not return to poetry until about 1912 or 1913 when, at the urging of Gide and the publisher Gallimard, he began the revision of his early poems for publication. This work of revision which included the rewriting of "Narcisse parle" led to the composition of the masterpiece La Jeune Parque and ultimately resulted in the mature poetic period of Charmes of which "Fragments du Narcisse" is an integral part. This

second major work on Narcissus which has lines in it taken intact from "Narcisse parle," will be studied next for confirmation of Valéry's early theories about poetry and their development. "Fragments du Narcisse" enables us to determine what Valéry discovers and what he rejects about poetry in the second stage of his "autobiographie poétique."

NOTES

[1]"Sur les 'Narcisse,'" p. 287.

[2]Letter from Mallarmé to Valéry quoted in Henri Mondor, L'Heureuse Rencontre de Valéry et Mallarmé (Lausanne: La Guilde du Livre, 1947), p. 86.

[3]Grubbs, p. 19.

[4]Agnes MacKay, The Universal Self, A Study of Paul Valéry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 31.

[5]Andre Berne-Joffroy, Présence de Válery, précédé de Propos me concernant par Paul Valéry (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1944), p. 184.

[6]Pierre-Olivier Walzer, La Poésie de Valéry (Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1966), p. 95.

[7]Walzer, pp. 89-90. Also in O, I, 1558.

[8]These early versions of "Narcisse parle" will be referred to again when the variants of the two major versions of the poem are analyzed in detail.

[9]"Sur les 'Narcisse,'" pp. 283-290.

[10]"Sur les 'Narcisse,'" pp. 283-84.

[11]These sonnets and information concerning them may be found in "Notes et Documents" in Correspondance de Paul Valéry et de Gustave Fourment 1887-1933, ed. Octave Nadal (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 211-216.

[12]"Sur la technique littéraire" in O, I, 1809.

[13]Also in "Calepin d'un poète," O, I, 1454.

[14]"De la diction des vers," O, II, 1254.

[15]Letter from Valéry to André Gide, 1 February 1891, Correspondance d'André Gide et de Paul Valéry 1890-1942, Préface et Notes par Robert Mallet (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 48. Hereafter cited as Correspondance Gide-Valéry. (Evidence indicates that Gide who added the date to this letter may have dated it incorrectly.)

[16]O, I, 1552-53. Appeared first in La Conque, 15 March 1891, pp. 4-5.

[17]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 54.

[18]Valéry discusses a similar circumstance related to the "Cimetière marin," an example of his theory that a poem is never finished but instead abandoned: "Une après-midi de l'an 1920, notre ami très regretté, Jacques Rivière, étant venu me faire visite, m'avait trouvé dans un 'état' de ce Cimetière marin, songeant à reprendre, à supprimer, à substituer, à intervenir ça et là... Il n'eut de cesse qu'il n'obtînt de le lire; et l'ayant lu, qu'il ne le ravît. Rien n'est plus décisif que l'esprit d'un directeur de revue. C'est ainsi que par accident fut fixée la figure de cet ouvrage. Il n'y a point de mon fait. Du reste, je ne puis en général revenir sur quoi que ce soit que j'aie écrit que je ne pense que j'en ferais tout autre chose si quelque intervention étrangère ou quelque circonstance quelconque n'avait rompu l'enchantement de ne pas en finir (O, I, 1500).

[19]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, pp. 48-49.

[20]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 50.

[21]See, for example, Louise Vinge, The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century (Lund: Gleerups, 1967).

[22]See Frederick Goldin, The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967).

[23]Jean Soulairol, Paul Valéry (Paris: La Colombe, 1952), pp. 147-49 suggests some similarities between Ronsard's elegy "La mort de Narcisse" and the Narcissus poems of Valéry.

[24]Gérard Genette, "Narcisse baroque," La Nouvelle Revue Française, 9 (1961), 558-564.

[25]"C'est le mythe de Narcisse, que nous retrouvons à chaque instant dans l'histore du Symbolisme," Guy Michaud, Message poétique du Symbolisme (Paris: Nizet, 1966), note, p. 34. "Le thème du narcissisme est intégré dans le symbolisme, puisque pour celui-ci le monde extérieur est un miroir de l'homme et de l'essence mystérieuse des choses," Henry Nicholas, Mallarmé et le Symbolisme (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1965), p. 93.

[26]More of the myth is utilized for his two other major works on Narcissus.

[27]Unless her presence is meant to be suggested by the unusually large number of internal echo rhymes in the poem.

[28]It should be noted, however, that Valéry said that he read Ovid only after Chantavoine's remarks in Le Journal des Débats. "S'il me fallait deféndre (s'il fallait deféndre Rien jugé par Néant), je commencerais par remercier le critique de m'avoir fait ouvrir Ovide pour la première, et sans doute ultime, fois. Je n'ai trouvé d'autre similitude que le titre dans son Narcisse, et trois mots seuls m'ont arrêté comme exquis" in Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 79.

[29]Maja Goth, "The Myth of Narcissus in the Works of Rilke and of Valéry," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 7 (1966), 14.

[30]Goth, p. 14.

[31]Leonardo da Vinci, Pierre Louÿs, Rimbaud, and Verlaine are four other major figures who undoubtedly influenced and impressed Valéry profoundly, but their influence does not seem to be as significant in respect to "Narcisse parle," although Louÿs, of course, requested the poem and published it.

[32]Generally accepted dates 1885-1895 for symbolism with a capital "S."

[33]"Huysmans est celui d'aujourd'hui dont mon âme s'accommode le mieux. J'en suis toujours à relire A rebours; c'est ma bible et mon livre de chevet." Lettres à quelques-uns (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 11.

[34]Henri Mondor, Précocité de Valéry (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 215.

[35]Jacques Charpier, Essai sur Paul Valéry (Paris: Seghers, 1956), p. 29.

[36]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 35.

[37]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 23.

[38]Paul Valéry, Cahiers, 29 vols. (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1957-1961), v. 1, p. 116.

[39]Lettres à quelques-uns, pp. 12-13.

[40]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 28.

[41]T.S. Eliot, From Poe to Valéry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), pp. 22-23.

[42]Eliot, p. 23. Joseph Chiari in Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé, The Growth of a Myth (London: Rockliff, 1956), pp. 166-167, repeats this general assessment concerning the influence of Poe on Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Valéry.

[43]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 97.

[44]Lucienne Julien Cain, Trois Essais sur Paul Valéry, "Edgar Poe et Valéry," (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 144-45.

[45]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 9.

[46]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 28-29.

[47]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 47.

[48]Michaud, p. 556.

[49]That Valéry no longer believes in the power of poetry as the "orphic explanation of the universe" after the crisis of 1892 is well-known.

[50]See O, I, 1485 for Valéry's discussion of the artists need to reject "[. . .] tout ce qui résulte de notre relation statistique avec nos semblables et de notre commerce obligatoire et obligatoirement impur avec le désordre monotone de la vie extérieure."

[51]Valéry generalizes this tendancy in "Sur les 'Narcisse.'" A cette epoque [1890's], les poètes disposaient volontiers de pierreries dont ils croyaient enrichir leurs ouvrages. Depuis, la poésie a connu les restrictions, nous sommes devenus plus simples, plus pauvres."

[52]Henri Mondor, L'Heureuse Rencontre de Valéry et Mallarmé (Lausanne: La Guilde du Livre, 1947), pp. 35-36.

[53]This is a brief but valuable aid to an understanding of the Valéry/Mallarmé relationship. It contains important letters rarely printed elsewhere, details, especially, the initial stages of their relationship, and recounts Valéry's important role as confidant to Mallarmé concerning Un Coup de dés and, subsequently, as a source of information about the poem.

[54]For example, "En ce qui concerne les influences que j'ai subies, la plus profonde n'est pas celle de Mallarmé: quelques lignes de Poe, l'influence de Wagner, l'idée que je me fais de Léonard, et maintes reflexions et lectures scientifiques ont joué le plus grand rôle dans le développement de ma pensée" (quoted in Mondor's Précocité de Valéry, p. 412). "Mallarmé ne devait pas avoir d'influence: c'est une proposition qui peut se démontrer. Influence, c'est imitation ou continuation. Imiter un être si singulier, c'est crier qu'on imite. Imiter un art si parfait, c'est une désastreuse affaire: cela coûte plus cher que de risquer d'être 'original'" (from a letter to Albert Thibaudet in 1912 in Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 98). Yet in an essay entitled "Stéphane Mallarmé" in Ecrits divers sur Mallarmé, in O, I, pp. 660-680, Valéry discusses in some detail the influence of Mallarmé on himself and other young poets of the 1890's.

[55]The lines which begin "O miroir!/ Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée" to "J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!"

[56]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 19.

[57]Fourment/Valéry letters, p. 116.

[58]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 50.

[59]Stéphane Mallarmé, OEuvres complètes, Texte établi et annoté par Henri Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 47.

[60]Mallarmé, p. 48.

[61]Précocité de Valéry, p. 214.

[62]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 56.

[63]In "Je disais quelquefois à Stéphane Mallarmé..." O, I, 649.

[64]The preface to the Correspondance Gide-Valéry by Robert Mallet is an extremely perceptive study of the friendship between Gide and Valéry.

[65]A question remains as to whether there is any relationship between the androgynous suggestion in "Narcisse parle" in such lines as "O chair d'adolescent et de princesse douce!" and the androgynous Adam in Gide's Traité.

[66]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 46.

[67]Both would eventually attend Mallarmé's "mardi soirs" frequently.

[68]"A Mon Ami Paul Ambroise Valéry avec qui j'ai fait un tel rêve" quoted in André Gide, Romans, récits et soties, oeuvres lyriques, Notices et Bibliographies par Yvonne Davet et Jean-Jacques Thierry, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 1458.

[69]Gide had planned a Narcissus poem; however, see Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 154 concerning "Narcisse secret."

[70]André Gide, Romans, récits . . ., p. 1457.

[71]André Gide, Romans, récits . . ., p. 1458.

[72]Letter of 25 Mai 1892: "Ton oncle [Charles Gide?] trouve le Traité du Narcisse trop symboliste." Letter of July 6, 1899: "J'ai reçu tes dernieres publications et je me suis amusé à les parcourir très vite entièrement, par goût du cinématographe et par expérience de style. J'ai r-aimé à ce point de vue le Narcisse et El Hadj" (p. 346).

[73]"Si vous avez lu mon hâtif poème, bien loin de l'oeuvre rêvée et que j'espère refaire un soir ou l'autre (car sans cet espoir je souffrirais, dites-moi clairement, comme une partie lucide et dégrisée de moi-même, ce que vous en induisez" (Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 50). Also in February 1891 when he sent the poem to Gide, "Dites-moi aussi franchement que vous parliez sous les cyprès et les térébinthes de ce pays sous la lune que moi je n'ai pas oublie [The Botanical garden where the tomb of Narcissa was] - dites-moi ce qu'il vous en semble," p. 54.

[74]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 56.

[75]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 56.

[76]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 56.

[77]Jean Hytier, "Formules valéryennes," Romanic Review, 47 (1956), 196.

[78]Paul Pieltain, "Métamorphoses d'un fragment du Narcisse de Paul Valéry," Cahiers d'analyse textuelle, 4 (1962), 34.

[79]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 57.

[80]From "Si la fontaine claire est par la nuit éteinte" to "Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte."

[81]"Lueur" is a weaker light than "lumière." "Lueur - lumière faible [. . .], illumination faible ou passagère." Paul Robert, Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française (Paris: Société du nouveau Littré, 1967), p. 1012.

[82]As in "Par le talent; quand, sur l'or glauque de lointaines" from Mallarmé's "L'Après-midi d'un faune," OEuvres complètes, p. 51.

[83]Correspondance Gide-Valéry, p. 56.

[84]"Mais il n'y a guère de changement dans les émotions qui gardent plus ou moins le même ton dans tout le poème. Toujours les faibles émotions d'un Narcisse languissant. On ne remarque guère vers la fin du poème le glissement d'une faible souffrance à une souffrance douce-amère où Narcisse se complaît. Ce sont les exigences de l'esthétique de 1890 que Valéry suit encore, qui produisent ces sensations affaiblies, adoucies. Dans L'Album, Valéry essaiera de corriger cette faiblesse d'émotion, notamment en doublant les emplois de la première personne et le nombre de strophes." Charles G. Whiting, Valéry, jeune poète (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), p. 65.

[85]Along with the line "Que je déplore...," Gide partially quotes another line ".....bras.....dont les gestes sont purs." He does not explain the objection to these two lines except to say: "Pour faire le normalien jusqu'au bout, excusez moi de trouver tout à fait au-dessous de vous...." Perhaps he does not like the repetition pur/purs at the end of the lines. At any rate, Valéry did not change the second line Gide refers to either. It remains: "Voici mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont purs."

[86]"Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur" is the only other line which appears in exactly the same form in the sonnets, La Conque, the Album, and even the Fragments du Narcisse, but, at first, it did have another form: "Où mes yeux ont puisé dans un mortel azur." This is mentioned by Jean Bellemin-Noël in "En Marge des premiers 'Narcisse,' l'en-jeu et le hors-jeu du texte," Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, 5-6 (1972), 975-991. One more point needs to be mentioned concerning "Que je déplore..." as the "vers donné." There is a factor which might be used to discount the theory. The prose poem version begins: "Que je déplore ton éclat, fontaine!" On the other hand, there is no proof that it antedated the sonnets.

[87]"Au sujet d'Adonis," O, I, 482.

[88]Walzer, p. 96.

[89]Originally the lines had been: "Assez pour deviner là-bas le Fiancé/ Dans ton miroir dont m'attire la lueur triste."

[90]A line reminiscent of another line of Valéry's "O dieu démon démiurge ou destin" quoted in Valéry/Fourment correspondance, p. 228 from an early poem called "Ambroise."

[91]And: rosée, rose, close, éclose, and so on.

[92]Additional internal rhyme: "lueur," and "heure" continuing the sound of "pleurs" two lines earlier and "fleurs" in the line before that. "Mon image de fleurs humides couronnée!/ Hélas l'image est vaine et les pleurs éternels."

[93]The words in this line repeat sounds found throughout the poem. "Délicieux" is related to "délie" and "délice," for example, and "glacé" follows "place" and is itself followed later by "gracile."

[94]"Joueur" may be seen as the symbol of the reader of the poem.

[95]In his essays on poetry, Valéry often speaks of the stage in poetic creation which he calls "attente." For example: "...Nous avons à poursuivre des mots qui n'existent pas toujours, et des coincidences chimériques; nous avons à nous maintenir dans l'impuissance, essayant de conjoindre des sons et des significations, et créant en pleine lumière l'un de ces cauchemars où s'épuise le rêveur, quand il s'efforce indéfiniment d'égaliser deux fantômes de lignes

aussi instables que lui-même. Nous devons donc passionnément attendre, changer d'heure et de jour comme l'on changerait d'outil, - et vouloir, vouloir... Et même, ne pas excessivement vouloir" (O, I, p. 480)(my emphasis).

[96]"Je chéris, en poésie comme en prose, les théories si profondes et si perfidement savantes d'Edgar Poe, je crois à la toute-puissance du rythme et surtout de l'épithète suggestive." From a letter to Karl Boès in 1889, Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 9 (my emphasis).

[97]Paraphrased from "Nécessité de la poésie," O, I, p. 1390.

[98]The same epigraph is used in both versions - "Narcissae placandis manibus."

[99]Whiting, p. 62.

[100]Whiting, p. 63.

[101]Pierre Michel, Valéry, L'écrivain symboliste et hermétique (Paris: Foucher n.d.), p. 20.

[102]Michel, p. 20.

[103]Michel, p. 20.

[104]Michel, p. 20.

[105]Whiting, p. 66.

[106]Whiting, p. 65.

[107]For Creuzer's role in the nineteenth and twentieth century interpretations of the Narcissus myth, see Vinge, especially Chapter 12, pp. 315-320.

[108]Guy Michaud, "Le Thème du miroir dans le symbolisme français," Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises, 11 (1959), 206.

[109]"Par conséquence, j'ai cessé de faire des vers. Cet art devenu impossible à moi de 1892 [. . .]." Letter from Valéry to Thibaudet in 1912 in Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 97. There were some exceptions, however. For example, two poems "Vue" and "Eté" were published in Le Centaure in 1896 and seem to have been written after 1892.

CHAPTER II

"FRAGMENTS DU NARCISSE"

Introduction and Background

"Fragments du Narcisse"[1] is one of the twenty-one poems in Valéry's collection of verse entitled Charmes. There are only two major collections of Valéry's poems: Album de vers anciens and Charmes. The chief link between the two is Valéry's use of the Narcissus myth. Albert Thibaudet, one of the earliest critics of Valéry's work, notes this when he says: "Au milieu du recueil, le Fragment du Narcisse établit la liaison de Charmes avec l'Album de Vers Anciens."[2] Quite significantly, earlier in his study he makes the following comment: "L'Album pourrait porter entier ce titre d'une de ses pièces: Narcisse parle. Et la liaison entre l'Album et Charmes, la pérennité du thème poétique que n'a jamais déserté Valéry, le Fragment du Narcisse publié dans Charmes nous en assure à nouveau."[3] The strong thematic bond between the two works facilitates study of the development of Valéry's theory of poetry. This bond is made even stronger by the fact that the first part of "Fragments du Narcisse" contains lines taken directly from "Narcisse parle."

In addition to its direct tie with Valéry's early poetic endeavors, "Fragments du Narcisse," as one of the most serious and important poems of Charmes, provides a suitable medium for the study of Valéry's poetics at the time of his serious return to poetry. Charmes, because it demonstrates a skillful use of a variety of forms and a masterful command of the tools of poetry, is a testament to the mature Valéry's consummate skill in poetic composition and expression. "Fragments du Narcisse" is a model of the craftmanship found in Charmes. The "Fragments" illustrates Valéry's increasing interest in and mastery of the rhetorical devices of poetry. A further increase in alliteration is readily noticeable, but there are also tropes and literary devices not found in "Narcisse parle," such as anacoluthon, anaphora, asyndeton, oxymoron, simile, etc. Although there is a determined movement away from obscurity in this particular poem, nevertheless, there is a calculated use of unusual syntax. Conscious attention to expressive sound patterns, particularly the harmonic use of vowels is also an important aspect of the exquisitely fashioned poetry of this work. After the writing of Charmes, the increased emphasis on the technical aspects and rhetorical devices of poetry comes up again and again in Valéry's pronouncements on poetry. In typical Valérian fashion, the theory is expounded after the practice.[4] For example, in "Au sujet du Cimetière marin" published in

1933 as the preface to Gustave Cohen's famous lecture on the poem, Valéry writes:

> L'univers poétique dont je parlais s'introduit par le nombre ou, plutôt, par la densité des images, des figures, des consonances, dissonances, par l'enchaînement des tours et des rythmes, - l'essentiel étant d'éviter constamment ce qui reconduirait à la prose, soit en la faisant regretter, soit en suivant exclusivement l'idée... (O, I, 1502-03).

A similar statement appears in "Questions de poésie:"

> Les rimes, l'inversion, les figures développées, les symétries et les images, tout ceci, trouvailles ou conventions, sont autant de moyens de s'opposer au penchant prosaïque du lecteur (comme les "règles" fameuses de l'art poétique ont pour effet de rappeler sans cesse au poète l'univers complexe de cet art). L'impossibilité de réduire à la prose son ouvrage, celle de le dire, ou de le comprendre en tant que prose sont des conditions impérieuses d'existence, hors desquelles cet ouvrage n'a poétiquement aucun sens (O, I, 1294).

For Valéry, perhaps the most important by-product of this emphasis on the conventions of poetry is that by increasing the poetry, he lessens its chances of being reduced to mere prose.

Valéry's poetic theory is revealed and clarified through the study of the poetic concepts and conventions that he utilized in the "Fragments du Narcisse," the second chapter of his "autobiographie poétique." Following a discussion of additional background material and a brief survey of some representative studies of the poem, the first fragment will be compared with "Narcisse parle."

This comparison focuses attention on the range of poetic conventions Valéry used for the poem, but, more importantly, it points out what he rejected about his early theory of poetry. Next, the question of influence is taken up, but, unlike the case of "Narcisse parle," it is a peripheral issue. Discussion is made necessary by the frequent allusions to other poets by the critics who discuss the "Fragments." Sorting out these comparisons and the question of possible sources does have positive results, however, since considerable light is shed on Valéry's thoughts on poetry. Reference to Lucretius, for example, brings out Valéry's position on the role of philosophy in poetry. Subsequently, outlining the Ovidian elements which appear in the poem also reflects aspects of Valéry's theory of poetry and underscores his unique ability to choose and modify Ovid's details to enhance his own concept of poetry. In the final section of this chapter, the subject of pure poetry will be taken up briefly, but the emphasis will be on additional theoretical and technical details of the "Fragments" which are important to an understanding of Valéry's poetics.

"Fragments du Narcisse" is a dramatic, often intensely lyrical, poem in three parts. Originally it was at the center of Charmes.[5] In the 1929 version, considered to have the definitive order, it is number nine following "Cantique des colonnes" and preceding "L'Abeille."

Taken as a whole, it is the longest poem in Charmes, 314 lines.

Each of the three fragments has a history of its own. The first part has the longest and most complicated background. It was first published in the Revue de Paris on the 15th of September, 1919 (pp. 261-64). Later versions appeared in the Revue Universelle in May 1921 and a month later in the Nouvelle Revue Française.[6] Also, in 1921, a version was published in La Pléiade which included for the first time, the epigraph - "Cur aliquid vidi?"[7] This first segment consisting of 148 lines is the longest of the three fragments which make up the poem. On the one hand, it is "Narcisse parle" greatly amplified; on the other hand, it is a major departure from the early poem. This seeming discrepancy will be cleared up in the course of the detailed analysis of the poem.

Although the first sixteen lines were published more than a year earlier in Le Divan, the entire second fragment, consisting of 116 lines, appeared first in the Nouvelle Revue Française in 1923.[8] The theme of love plays a major role in all three parts of the poem, but it is treated most objectively and completely in this second fragment.

Most fragmentary in appearance, the third segment is composed of two sections separated by a line of dots. The second of the two parts begins and ends with an

unrhymed line. Yet, in many ways the fragmentary aspect of this part is illusory. The images, vocabulary, and overall poetry of this section, just like the others, is very carefully wrought. First published in the Nouvelle Revue Français on May 1, 1922,[9] this fifty-line fragment, like the first, is reminiscent of "Narcisse parle." The motif of the final kiss appears again, and there is also a tender rendering of "adieux," but the tone is different, extremely anguished and tragic.

The three fragments were not united until the Stols edition of Narcisse in 1926[10] and the 1926 edition of Charmes. The 1922 edition of Charmes contained only the first fragment.[11]

As was the case with studies of "Narcisse parle," it is Pierre-Olivier Walzer who once again presents the most adequate background information.[12] Among other important facts, he points out a common error which states that the first publication of the first fragment was in the Revue Universelle of May 1, 1921 when, in fact, it first appeared in the Revue de Paris in 1919. Most of the background material supplied by Walzer plus additional data, such as the variants, can be found in O, I, 1663-1673. Also included there are some of Valéry's own comments made in interviews and lectures on the subject of "Fragments du Narcisse." For example, this paragraph from the lecture "Sur les 'Narcisse,'" appears in O, I, 1671-72.

> Assez longtemps après, l'idée m'est venue de faire une sorte de contre-partie à ce poème si sévère et si obscur de la Jeune Parque. J'ai choisi, ou plus exactement s'est choisi lui-même, ce thème du Narcisse d'autrefois, propre à ce je voulais faire, c'est-à-dire une oeuvre qui soit presque la contre-partie de la Jeune Parque, autrement simple dans sa forme et ne donnant lieu à presque aucune difficulté de compréhension, en portant surtout mon effort sur l'harmonie même de la langue.[13]

Valéry has also made a number of comments concerning Narcissus in the Cahiers and in letters and articles, many of them not mentioned in the background information in the Hytier edition of the OEuvres. A number of these remarks will be brought up subsequently.

While Valéry's own commentary can be extremely helpful to the reader attempting to understand his utilization of the Narcissus myth, it is limited and does not go into a number of important questions raised by the poem. Although there are not countless exegeses of "Fragments du Narcisse" as there are of Valéry's La Cimetière marin or La Jeune Parque, still it has been analyzed quite often and definitely more often than either of his other works on Narcissus, "Narcisse parle" and Cantate du Narcisse. Several of the studies of the "Fragments" turn out to be very valuable in terms of increasing the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the poem. Even though "Fragments du Narcisse" is not as difficult as the Cimetière marin nor as obscure as La Jeune Parque, it is, nonetheless, a complex and rich work

requiring sustained and determined analysis for maximum comprehension and appreciation.

Among the analyses of "Fragments du Narcisse," Wallace Fowlie's "Valéry's Dream of Narcissus"[14] is a good introduction to the poem. It is probably the most thoughtful study in English. Frequently thought-provoking, it is a broad look at the poem with some fine details. While Fowlie concentrates primarily on the philosophical implications of Valéry's meditation and emphasizes that the poem has the characteristics of a tragedy, he also mentions, albeit briefly, several important points related to Valéry's theory of poetry. He understands, for example, that Valéry sees poetic creation as an exercise: ". . . it is an exercise and one of the most brilliant he ever wrote, on a theme that obsessed him throughout his life, both in the narrow sense of the Greek myth and in the broader philosophical sense of the 'self.'"[15] For Valéry the concept that writing poetry was primarily an exercise was a strong conviction, seriously maintained and often repeated after his return to poetry.[16] In a letter to André Fontainas, he mentions the idea in relation to his masterpiece La Jeune Parque: "Oui, je me suis imposé pour ce poème des lois, observances constantes, qui en constituent le véritable objet. C'est bien un exercice . . . " (O, I, 1631). He even expresses the idea in the dedication of La Jeune Parque to Gide:

"A André Gide/ Depuis bien des années/ j'avais laissé l'art des vers:/ essayant de m'y astreindre encore,/ j'ai fait cet exercice/ que je te dédie. 1917" (O, I, 96). Again and again the point comes up in his theoretical discussions on poetry: ". . . je rapporte tout ce que je pense de l'art à l'idée d'exercise, que je trouve la plus belle du monde."[17] Specifically in relation to "Fragments du Narcisse:"

> Je lui dis que Narcisse était né dans mon esprit trente-six ans avant, à l'occasion d'une pierre où le feminin de son nom est gravé; que l'image de cet amateur de soi-même m'avait séduit en premier par sa grâce, et donné l'idée d'un poème fort simple où il n'y eût que le chant d'un malheureux trop beau. Bien des années plus tard, je repris ce thème si pur, et m'en fis un exercise.[18] (My emphasis)

When Valéry seriously returned to poetry about 1912 or 1913, what primarily interested him about poetic creation was how much of the mind it was capable of engaging; and, conversely, he recognized that the exercise of writing poetry stimulated the mind:

> Tandis que je m'abandonnais avec d'assez grandes jouissances à des réflexions de cette espèce, et que je trouvais dans la poésie un sujet de questions infinies, la même conscience de moi-même qui m'y engageait me représentait qu'une spéculation sans quelque production d'oeuvres ou d'actes qui la puissent vérifier est chose trop douce pour ne pas devenir, si profonde ou si ardue qu'on la poursuive en soi, une tentation prochaine de facilité

> sous des apparences abstraites. Je m' apercevais que ce qui désormais m'intéressait dans cet art était la quantité d'esprit qu'il me semblait pouvoir développer, et qu'il excitait d'autant plus qu'on se faisait de lui une idée plus approfondie. Je ne voyais pas moins nettement que toute cette dépense d'analyse ne pouvait prendre un sens et une valeur que moyennant une pratique et une production qui s'y rapportât.[19]

What is important to Valéry is the labor which goes into the poem and the way the mind functions in creation. It is the means not the end which Valéry values most. "En somme, je regarde bien plus amoureusement aux méthodes qu'aux resúltats, et la fin ne me justifie pas les moyens car - il n'y a pas de fin" (O, I, 1472).

The last part of the preceding quotation, which Valéry emphasizes, is related to another important factor that comes up in Fowlie's discussion of the poem - the idea that, for Valéry, a poem is never finished: "Valéry is constantly establishing an opposition between life and the mind of the poet observing life. But he is also constantly establishing a connection between life and the poet's mind. Life never comes to a completion (until, of course, the event of death) and a poem is therefore never completed until the poet's death arrests all future work on it."[20] Valéry felt very strongly about this point, too: "Une oeuvre n'est jamais nécessairement finie, car celui qui l'a faite ne s'est jamais accompli..." (O, I, 1450-51).[21] He comments at length on the subject

in "Au sujet du Cimetière marin:"

> On en arrive au travail pour le travail. Aux yeux de ces amateurs d'inquiétude et de perfection, un ouvrage n'est jamais achevé, - mot qui pour eux n'a aucun sens, - mais abandonné; et cet abandon, qui le livre aux flammes ou au public (et qu'il soit l'effet de la lassitude ou de l'obligation de livrer), leur est une sorte d'accident, comparable à la rupture d'une réflexion, que la fatigue, le fâcheux, ou quelque sensation viennent rendre nulle.
>
> J'avais contracté ce mal, ce gôut pervers de la reprise indéfinie, et cette complaisance pour l'état réversible des oeuvres, à l'âge critique où se forme et se fixe l'homme intellectuel. Je les ai retrouvés dans toute leur force, quand, vers la cinquantaine, les circonstances ont fait que je me remisse à composer . . . (O, I, 1497).

Not only did Valéry revise his poems over and over again, he went so far as to say:

> J'ai été blâmé, par exemple, d'avoir donné plusieurs textes du même poème, et même contradictoires. Ce reproche m'est peu intelligible, comme on peut s'y attendre, après ce que je viens d'exposer. Au contraire, je serais tenté [. . .] d'engager les poètes à produire, à la mode des musiciens, une diversité de variantes ou de solutions du même sujet. Rien ne me semblerait plus conforme à l'idée que j'aime à me faire d'un poète et de la poésie (O, I, 1501).

The use and re-use of the Narcissus theme by Valéry dramatizes his strong belief that a poem is never finished, that alternate solutions are always possible and should be tried, and that variations or modulations are just as legitimate for poetry as they are for music.

In the course of Fowlie's study of the poem, two more aspects of Valéry's poetic theory are mentioned. He recognizes that the subject of the poem is not important,[22] and he seems aware of the role Valéry designates for the reader as a kind of co-creator with the poet.

> The idea of a poem, its theme, its subject matter, is not its purpose. A poem must go beyond what it affirms, otherwise it is prose, language for mere communication. The poems of Valéry demand the full creative powers of the reader.[23]

Somewhat related to the premise that the subject of a Valérian poem is unimportant is the anti-personal nature of Valéry's poems. Noticing this aspect in "Fragments du Narcisse," Fowlie comments as follows.

> The very personal incidents in Valéry's life are not known with any certainty. In 1892, he suffered over love for a woman, but there is no trace of this passion in his early poems.[24] There is probably some trace of it in Fragments du Narcisse, in the second part of the poem, but this is so universalized and transposed that it is not the autobiography of Paul Valéry, but a poet's creation.[25]

One final point that Fowlie makes about the relationship of poetry to the "Fragments" is to see the theme of poetry embodied in the poem:

> During the unfolding of the myth, Valéry describes the calm of the forest scene, the silence of the fountain, and Narcissus' discovery of his image. As he remains immobile, his love grows in him until it reaches a high point of fervor. As thus narrated, it is also the myth of poetry, the discovery of

> poetry as it rises up in the self when the self is immobilized and totally attentive to the emotion that is forming in words. The happiness of the poet is the tranquility of the self when he allows the image to form. So Narcissus and his image are in reality the poet and his poem. They are as totally separated one from the other as Narcissus is separated from his image, but they are bound to one another in the sense that one is dependent on the other, that one comes from the other.[26]

In addition to his observations bearing on Valéry's poetics, Fowlie makes other discerning remarks of a more general nature which are worth noting. While he is aware of the essentially depersonalized nature of Valéry's poem, Fowlie, nevertheless, senses that the "art, the temperament, the intellect and struggles of Paul Valéry are all present in "Fragments du Narcisse."[27] For Fowlie,

> Fragments du Narcisse is a long poem on the encounter of a young man with his own image. Whereas in the myth, the beauty of his face and his body is the cause of the wonderment, in Valéry's poem the cause of the wonderment and self-examination is more dominantly philosophical. The erotic attraction is certainly present but the protagonist is struck by the contrast between his uniqueness and his universality.[28]

Fowlie does not quote Valéry on this point, but it is important to realize that Valéry himself mentions this duality of the unique and the universal in relation to "Fragments du Narcisse." Reporting a conversation he had with Rainer-Maria Rilke about the theme of Narcissus,

he recalls that he said apropos of the "Fragments:"

> Ce travail me conduisit à examiner mon sujet sous divers aspects, c'est-à-dire à rechercher ce que l'on peut trouver d'essentiel dans la rencontre d'un être avec son image. Ce n'est plus la beauté de son visage et de sons corps qui apparaît alors au Narcisse. C'est le contraste entre l'Unique et l'Universel qu'il se sent être, et cette personne finie et particulière qu'il se voit dans le miroir d'eau... (Mais ceci n'a pas figuré dans mon poème.)[29]

Fowlie summarizes each fragment concisely (p. 77) and then makes the following overall characterization of the poem, that it is three moments or scenes of a meditation which Valéry laboriously made into his most poignant poem on the conscience and the consciousness of the self (p. 77).

While he does not, by any means, attempt a line by line discussion of the poem, a number of vocabulary details are carefully explained and certain important lines are discussed in quite some detail. Further discussion of Fowlie's analysis of specific points in the poem will be taken up where they become pertinent.

Another substantial study of "Fragments du Narcisse" is found in James Lawler's: Lecture de Valéry, Une Etude de Charmes.[30] Characterizing the poem as a "soliloque tragique," Lawler, like Fowlie, underscores the dramatic as well as the tragic nature of the poem:

> Le crépuscule est un moment privilégié de la création des mythes. La nuit

> remplace le jour, le sommeil la veille, et la lumière connaît une ultime extase. Un chant d'amour s'élève de la nature et des hommes, mais tout sera bientôt absorbé par la mort puisque l'objet aimé est essentiellement fugitif. Ce thème, comme Valéry l'a bien compris, n'est pas seulement dramatique mais tragique et les trois actes de son poème décrivent un mouvement inévitable sous le signe des dieux. L'exclamation "hélas," entendue cinq fois, rappelle la fatale impuissance des hommes à arrêter le flot des événements ou à jamais atteindre à l'objet de leur plus vif désir.[31]

Lawler's analysis follows the general thrust of the poem very diligently, often line by line. Unfortunately, at times, what he says tends to be little more than a running account in prose of what Valéry rendered so perfectly in poetry, for example, the lines two to twenty-two discussed on pages 103 to 104. This is certainly not always the case, however. In his analysis of the second fragment, for instance, Lawler does develop the import as well as recapitulating the substance. Quoting the lines: "L'oiseau mort, le fruit mûr, lentement descendus,/ Et les rares lueurs des clairs anneaux perdus..." Lawler amplifies the section on the lovers as follows:

> Ce dernier vers, qui évoque avec une simplicité classique tous les amours qui ont été et sont disparus, introduit l'épisode des amants qui se terminera en une frénésie nostalgique: cependant nous savons d'ores et déjà quel doit être le résultat inévitable de leur aventure. L'épisode commence (v. 171-179) par la description de la séparation du feuillage. (Nous nous souvenons

> du vers 65 où l'image de Narcisse se révéla de façon parallèle.) La fontaine reflète le tourment des amants, leur passion brûlante, comparés au calme et à la froideur de l'eau. L'amant triomphe de la nuque précieuse, éprouve un pouvoir illusoire, forme le "monstre" de l'amour. L'union est réalisée, ou tout au moins il le semble; mais les amants ont les yeux fermés, ils se mentent, la mort est présente quand leur sang devient une pourpre redoutable et le noeud monstrueux de leurs corps se défait déjà.[32]

On a number of points, the conclusions drawn by Lawler and Fowlie are strikingly similar.[33] In particular, the last section of both studies develops the same notion. Lawler says: "Chacun des trois actes de ce drame s'ouvre sur une invocation: aux Nymphes, à la fontaine, au propre corps de Narcisse."[34] Along similar lines Fowlie states: "Each of the three fragments begins with an invocation and what is invoked becomes the central part of the development."[35] Fowlie goes on to show how each invocation becomes an essential element of its segment. Lawler, in more detail, integrates the invocations of the first two fragments (pp. 114-15). By bringing out this structural similarity found in each of the three segments, they present one of the many ways in which the three parts, seemingly so dissimilar, are carefully woven together by Valéry to give the poem an unexpected unity which its title belies.

After calling the reader's attention to several places in the Cahiers where Valéry discusses the subject

of Narcissus,[36] Lawler makes an important point concerning Valéry's poetic theory. He sees that the poem is not, in essence, a metaphysical expression but is instead unquestionably tied in with Valéry's poetics.

> Si nous regrettons que Valéry n'ait jamais terminé l'essai sur le mythe qu'il eut l'intention d'écrire en 1921 et dont le huitième cahier nous montre les éléments, il nous faut croire toutefois qu'il n'aurait pas ajouté nécessairement beaucoup à notre appréciation de la poésie car le poème est dans son essence la mise en oeuvre de sa propre loi de composition et non l'expression d'une métaphysique: "Le fond importe peu, lieux communs. Ma vraie pensée n'est pas adaptable aux vers."[37]

Developing further the thought that the "Fragments" is an expression of Valéry's theory of poetry, Lawler, quoting Valéry, stresses a point already discussed: Valéry's preoccupation with the idea of utilizing the same theme over and over again: "Je conçois, quant à moi, que le même sujet et presque les mêmes mots pourraient être repris indéfiniment et occuper toute une vie."[38]

Although he does not develop the idea in depth, Lawler recognizes that the "Fragments" is a part of Valéry's "autobiographie poétique." He expresses it this way: "Auto-biographie est employé ici, non dans le sens de confession personnelle, mais surtout de témoignage des changements survenus dans les préoccupations formelles du poète. Fragments se présentait tout d'abord à son auteur, à l'instar des autres poèmes de Charmes, comme un problème

formel à résoudre, et le sujet aussi bien que la versification font partie de cette solution."[39]

Later, Lawler quotes a key statement made by Valéry about a difficult problem which he posed for himself: "Ce qui m'a particulièrement requis dans le Second Narcisse, c'est la combinaison de la période syntaxique et de cette structure musicale perpétuelle, le vers, au sens syllabique du terme, divisant le développement de la phrase et formant en quelque sorte une loi de liaison de plus entre les parties."[40] Before quoting the eight lines which run from "O douceur de survivre à la force du jour" to "Et s'étendre en un songe en qui le soir se change," Lawler remarks: "Une exemple le montrera mieux que tout commentaire tel que cette magnifique période (v. 48-55) qui renferme dans sa plénitude de couleur et de suggestion érotique une évocation du coucher du soleil."[41] In order to further illustrate the originality of the lines and Valéry's successful resolution of the technical problem which he posed for himself, Lawler compares the eight lines to the alexandrines of La Jeune Parque which he feels were "un rappel continuel du viol sauvage et mystérieux de la chair."[42] On the other hand, with these eight lines, he suggests that we find the sweetness of love and a joyous lassitude, a surrender to regular movement.[43] He concludes:

> Dans les vers cités ci-dessus, les rimes, les assonances et la subtile modulation des nasales, surtout remarquables dans les derniers vers, ont un pouvoir exceptionnel de

> suggestion, tant à cause de l'unité de la longue période dont la mesure rythmique est le distique que de la beauté sensuelle des images qui évoquent un moment singulier d'enchantement suspendu.[44]

In addition to the studies done by Fowlie and Lawler, there are several other worthwhile analyses of the "Fragments" which can not be neglected, such as Alain's comments in his annotation of Charmes, and an article of a more technical nature, Eva-Maria Gerstel's, "The Creative Process in Two Early Manuscripts of Paul Valéry's 'Fragments du Narcisse.'"[45] These will be referred to later. For now, one additional interpretation will be examined, the chapter on the "Fragments" in Pierre-Olivier Walzer's La Poésie de Valéry. In addition to a wealth of background material, Walzer provides a brief but perceptive analysis of the poem. I will return to his discussion of the first fragment momentarily. A vital feature of his examination of the second fragment is his demonstration of how Valéry differs remarkably from the Romantic poets in his presentation of the theme of past love. Walzer, who feels that Valéry cruelly lays bare the vanity of love and the illusions it engenders, describes roughly thirty lines, from "Tant il garde l'éclat de leurs jours les plus beaux" (55) to "Brûle un secret baiser qui la rend furieuse..." (82).

> Ce jour consacré au souvenir n'est qu'un nouveau "jour de désespoir." Au contraire des illustres amants romantiques, les amants de Valéry ne connaissent point l'apaisement consolateur qui naît d'un contact

> intime, presque mystique, avec la nature. Pour eux, "la rose même est amère dans l'air." Ils ne trouvent point de consolation à apostropher les eaux, les arbres ou les rochers, tous êtres qui demeurent: ils ne rencontrent dans la nature, ils n'en retiennent que ses éléments fluides et périssables, les souffles, les parfums, les feuilles qu'emporte le vent. Le soleil même leur est ennemi, qui ne sait qu'éclairer ce qui n'est plus et dissiper les chimères, les "songes absolus" qu'ont enfantés leurs âmes. Ils sont incapables de purifier leur passion en divinisant son souvenir. Au contraire, tout la leur rappelle avec une acuité singulière. Au lieu que les cris de révolte se changent en hymne d'adoration chez les Romantiques, les amants du Narcisse hésitent jusqu'au bout entre "la caresse et le meurtre;" un "secret baiser" les brûle, rend leur âme "furieuse," et leur rappelle constamment, dans leurs songes de la nuit et du jour, leur radicale, leur inguérissable insatisfaction.[46]

Valéry successfully renews an old theme by means of his stark realism and complete avoidance of sentimentality. With this "exercise" in both form and content, Valéry adequately meets the challenge he set himself, to completely recast the old, worn-out theme of past love.

With respect to part three of the poem, which generally tends to be seriously neglected by most critics, Walzer makes a precise, but, unfortunately, brief assessment of approximately the first twenty-five lines:

> L'amour que Narcisse se porte arrive ici à un point d'exaspération jamais atteint. Ce corps qu'il découvre dans le miroir des eaux lui apparaît de plus en plus désirable. Il le doue

> d'une conscience et renverse les rôles: c'est le reflet du corps, hôte du "ciel sombre" de la fontaine, qui est maintenant capable de séduire Narcisse. Quel secret rôde sur ses lèvres? "J'aime...J'aime!..." Est-ce la réponse à la question posée à la fin du fragment précédent? En tout cas, elle n'apprend rien au bel adolescent: "Et qui donc peut aimer autre chose - Que soi-même?..." Mais encore faudrait-il que cet amour de soi ne restât pas stérile. Pour se rejoindre en un dernier effort, avant que la nuit n'ait tout à fait aboli son image, Narcisse élève vers les dieux, "Maîtres heureux, Pères des justes fraudes" une suppliante prière, leur demandant de suspendre la fuite de jour. Nouvelle reprise, en des termes infiniment précieux, d'un thème romantique: "O temps! suspends ton vol!"[47]

The reversal of roles which Walzer mentions, Valéry handles subtly and effectively. The expression of panic and extreme frustration which characterizes this fragment reaches an intensity unequaled elsewhere in the poem, yet there is a remarkable, almost unparalleled, poetic control. This is especially evident in the prayer, a highly concentrated, beautiful supplication. The technical means employed by Valéry in this third fragment will be amplified later.

"Narcisse parle" and the "Fragments"

Walzer's treatment of the first fragment serves as an introduction and an aid to a full length discussion of the differences and similarities between "Narcisse parle" and the first section of "Fragments du Narcisse."

The purpose of this comparison will be to show specifically what has evolved and what has remained constant in Valéry's poetic theory over a significant period of time, about thirty years.

First of all, Walzer describes the number and the arrangement of lines in the first version of this first fragment which appeared in the Revue de Paris in 1919. He points out which lines of the final version were already a part of this first stage, what elements of "Narcisse parle" it contained, and in what form. For example, lines twenty-nine to thirty-nine of the final version made up the first part of the earliest version. Lines thirty-five to thirty-nine were taken directly from "Narcisse parle" and line thirty-seven which ultimately became "J'entends l'herbe des nuits croître dans l'ombre sainte," was still "J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte." The first version, in addition, consisted of lines 72 to 75, followed by 56 to 67 and 109-148, but lines 66 and 67 were reversed and considerably revised while 109-114 also contained variations.[48] Lines 110-114 were borrowed from "Narcisse parle" as were lines 115-120.

Given the information in the Oeuvres (pp. 1664-65) and Walzer's comments, it is possible to reconstruct the first version. This will simplify additional discussion. The lines from "Narcisse parle" are indicated

by placing a dash (on the left) in front of each line of the sequence. The numbers on the right indicate the position of the line in the definitive version.

	Heureux vos corps fondus, Eaux planes et profondes!	29
	Je suis seul!...si les Dieux, les échos et les ondes,	
	Et si tant de soupirs permettent qu'on le soit.	
	Seul!... mais encor celui qui s'approche de soi	
	Quand il s'approche aux bords que bénit ce feuillage...	
	Des cimes, l'air déjà cesse le pur pillage,	
"Np"	--La voix des sources change, et me parle du soir;	35
	--Un grand calme m'écoute, où j'écoute l'espoir.	
	--J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte,	
	--Et la lune perfide élève son miroir	
	--Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte.	39
	--Et moi! De tout mon coeur dans ces roseaux jeté,	
	--Je languis, ô saphir, par ma triste beauté!	
	--Je ne sais plus aimer que l'eau magicienne	
	--Où j'oubliai le rire et la rose ancienne.	
	--Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur	72
	--Si mollement de moi fontaine environnée	
	--Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur,	
	Les yeux mêmes et noirs de leur âme étonnée	75
	Quelle perte en soi-même offre un si calme lieu!	56
	L'âme jusqu'à périr s'y penche pour un Dieu	
	Qu'elle demande à l'onde, onde déserte, et digne	
	Sur son lustre, du lisse effacement d'un cygne...	
	A cette onde jamais ne burent les troupeaux	
	D'autres ici perdus trouveraient le repos,	
	Et dans la sombre terre un clair tombeau qui s'ouvre...	
	Mais ce n'est pas le calme, hélas! que j'y découvre	
	Quand l'opaque délice où dort cette clarté	
	Cède à mon corps l'horreur du feuillage écarté,	65
	Et que, repoussant l'ombre et l'épaisseur panique,	67
	Je vois, je tombe, et viens de ce corps tyrannique	66
	Appartenir sans force aux éternels attraits!	109
"Np"	--Là, nue entre les bras qui naissent des forêts,	
	--Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe,	
	--Et d'un reste du jour se forme un fiancé	
	--Pur sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste,	
	--Délicieux démon, désirable et glacé!...	114

--Voici dans l'eau ma chair de lune et de rosée
--O forme obéissante à mes voeux opposée
--Voici mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont
purs!...
--Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent
--D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent
--Et je crie aux échos les noms des dieux obscurs!

Mais que sa bouche est belle en ce muet blasphème!

O semblable!... Et pourtant plus parfait que
moi-même
Ephémère immortel si clair devant mes yeux
Pâles membres de perle et ces cheveux soyeux,
Faut-il qu'à peine aimés, l'ombre les obscurcisse,
Et que la nuit déjà nous devise, ô Narcisse,
Et glisse entre nous deux le fer qui coupe un
fruit!
Qu'as-tu? Ma plainte même est funeste?...Le bruit
Du souffle que j'enseigne à tes lèvres, mon double,
Sur la limpide lame a fait courir un trouble!...
Tu trembles? Mais ces mots que j'expire à genoux
Ne sont pourtant qu'une âme hésitante entre nous,
Entre ce front si pur et ma lourde mémoire...
Je suis si près de toi que je pourrais te boire,
O visage!... Ma soif est un esclave nu...

Jusqu'à ce temps charmant je m'étais inconnu,
Et je ne savais pas me chérir et me joindre!
Mais te voir, cher esclave, obéir à la moindre
Des ombres dans mon coeur se fuyant à regret
Voir mon silence agir et briller mon secret,
Voir, ô merveille, voir! ma bouche nuancée
Trahir...peindre sur l'onde une fleur de pensée,
Et quels événements étinceler dans l'oeil!
J'y trouve un tel trésor d'impuissance et
d'orgueil,
Que nulle vierge enfant échappée au satyre,
Nulle! aux fuites habiles, aux chutes sans émoi,
Nulle des nymphes, nulle amie... ne m'attire
Comme tu fais sur l'onde inépuisable Moi!...

This very first version of "Fragments du Narcisse" has seventy-one lines, almost one-half of the final version of 148. Of the seventy-one, approximately one-third are from "Narcisse parle" (twenty-three lines). Although several of these lines from the earlier poem will undergo

modification later, only four of them from "Et moi! De tout mon coeur dans ces roseaux jeté," to "Où j'oubliai le rire et la rose ancienne," will be totally discarded for the later definitive version of the poem. They were undoubtedly omitted as Walzer indicates because of "leur vocabulaire par trop symbolisant."[49]

The lines are taken in sequence, and almost intact, from the 1920 version of "Narcisse parle," beginning with the second stanza and ending with the last line of the sixth. In this first version of the "Fragments," however, they appear in two groups separated by fourteen lines. The first incorporation consists of twelve lines, the second eleven.

Valéry excluded only two lines from the five borrowed stanzas.:

> Mon image de fleurs humides couronnée!
> Hélas! L'image est vaine et les pleurs éternels!

In their place he substituted one line:

> Les yeux mêmes et noirs de leur âme étonnée

One good reason for the replacement of the lines is that the leitmotif of flower images so important to "Narcisse parle" does not appear in the first "Fragment." Also, in this version, the word "vaine" is not so dramatically emphasized through repetition as it was in "Narcisse parle." Walzer characterizes the omission and substitution as follows:

> Néanmoins le dernier vers ("Mon image de fleurs humides couronnée") a été transformé, car Valéry a fait disparaître des Fragments toutes les fleurs et les pierreries qui ornaient -et dataient- son premier essai; dans le présent passage, les fleurs sont remplacée par des "yeux ...noirs" qui figurent peut-être les mystères du regard intérieur, et qui sont plus à leur place, ici, que la gracieuse image de l'Album. Ces quelques modifications suffisent à indiquer que l'orientation générale du poème s'est profondément transformée.[50]

As Walzer indicates, the general orientation of the poem is greatly changed; overall, however, modifications in the borrowed lines are relatively minor. Of the twenty-three lines used, the first two are merely reversed, making the development more logical; minor punctuation changes occur;[51] and the second group of lines, which were appropriated for the "Fragments," are modified in part, but only one line is dramatically altered. In "Narcisse parle" the lines read:

> A travers les bois bleus et les bras fraternels,
> Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe,
> Et d'un reste du jour me forme un fiancé
> Nu, sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste...
> Délicieux démon, désirable et glacé!

For the first version of the "Fragment," changes occur in the first, third, and fourth lines of the original stanza.

> Là, nue entre les bras qui naissent des forêts,
> Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe,
> Et d'un reste du jour se forme un fiancé
> Pur sur la place pâle ou m'attire l'eau triste,
> Délicieux démon, désirable et glacé!

The changes in the first line, which was almost totally revamped, could very well have been necessitated by the demands of rhyme. A word was needed to rhyme with the word "attraits" of the new line which precedes the sequence in the new version. This type of alteration would be an example of Valéry's working inward from the form to the content as he so often maintained was the case when he wrote poetry.[52] Having now used "nue" in the first line, Valéry opts to remove it from the third line and the result is an increase in alliteration, an extremely typical change for Valéry to make, demonstrated already in chapter one.[53] One final change takes place, "se" replaces "me" in the third line.

Given the fairly long series of lines adopted so closely and directly from "Narcisse parle" for the first version of the "Fragments," it is obvious that the early poem continued to play a significant role in the unfolding drama of Valéry's poetics at the time when he was writing the poems of Charmes. "Narcisse parle" is the core of the first version of the "Fragments." Some of the lines used go all the way back to the version which appeared in La Conque in 1890. For example:

> Et la lune perfide élève son miroir
>
> Je languis, ô saphir, par ma triste beauté,
>
> Voici dans l'eau ma chair de lune et de rosée
>
> Voice mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont purs...
> Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent
> D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent.

Two lines go back even further to the earliest sonnet forms: "Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur" and "Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur."

The re-use of lines provides valuable insight into Valéry's method of composition. He seems to feel that certain of his lines are perfect from the beginning. In some cases these could of course be the famous "vers donnés," of which he speaks so often. On the other hand, some lines Valéry reworks again and again, making necessary technical improvements as he hones his poetic tools more and more precisely over the years. Still other lines seem justes in their first state, or at an early stage fitting perfectly with related lines in terms of harmony, vocabulary, imagery, etc., yet Valéry changes them. This type of modification could very well reflect his belief in the value of variation on a theme or be the discovery of a different solution to a poetic problem which he had posed for himself. This does not, however, invalidate the poetry of the earlier form. An example of the latter type of change may have occurred with the line, "J'entends l'herbe d'argent grandir dans l'ombre sainte." This line which went through a series of metamorphoses reached a kind of perfection in the 1920 version of "Narcisse parle." It was technically flawless, and had attained the precise metallic, Symbolist quality necessary for a poem like "Narcisse parle." It seemed

to fit equally well in the first version of the "Fragments" beautifully describing the silvery effect of the moonlight, but Valéry revised it for the third version to:

> J'entends l'herbe des nuits croître dans l'ombre sainte.

This "solution," retained for the definitive version, does not negate the poetic achievement of the earlier form. The final form, however, which substitutes "nuits" for "or," is less ornamental fitting the more somber tone of the "Fragments." In addition, the infinitive "croître" is the same verb used by Chateaubriand in the passage seen by Hytier as the source of Valéry's line.

The series of revisions and rejections, and the significant retention of certain lines from "Narcisse parle" for the "Fragments" reveals the crux of Valéry's method of composition. As Walzer suggests:

> Tant d'hésitation, tant de changements, tant de redistributions des groupes de vers donnent une juste idée de cette composition par "îles" qui fut déjà pratiquée à propos de la Jeune Parque, et qui fut d'ailleurs la méthode de composition de Valéry pour tous ses grands poèmes. La dernière difficulté à laquelle se heurte l'artisan, c'est toujours la façon d'imbriquer les unes dans les autres les différentes pièces de la marqueterie poétique. Tant de variations justifient aussi peut-être ce titre modeste: "fragments."[54]

Walzer's comments are made with respect to all five versions of the first fragment, but the first one, as

it has been discussed here in relation to "Narcisse parle," reveals at least in microcosm the same elements of Valéry's method of composition, regrouping, rejecting, etc.

When Walzer describes the other early versions of the first fragment, he mentions, for example, that the version published by la Pléiade in 1921 was exactly like the first version except for the addition of six lines which became lines twenty-three to twenty-eight in the final version. This, of course, gives the poem a new beginning. Similarly, the opening lines of the first version from "Heureux vos corps fondus, Eaux planes et profondes!" to "Des cimes, l'air déjà cesse le pur pillage," replacing the first stanza of "Narcisse parle," constituted a new beginning which resulted in a dramatic change in the poem from the outset. In fact, a new poem was created which, although it used the old poem as its core, was strikingly transformed due to the removal of poetic elements which dated it so obviously as a poem in the Symbolist style.

In order to clarify further the process and significance of the development leading to the final version of the first fragment, the definitive form from Charmes will be quoted now in full, with the lines from "Narcisse parle" indicated on the left by dashes.

Fragments du Narcisse

Cur aliquid vidi?

I

Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course!

Ce soir, comme d'un cerf, la fuite vers la source
Ne cesse qu'il ne tombe au milieu des roseaux,
Ma soif me vient abattre au bord même des eaux,
Mais, pour désaltérer cette amour curieuse,
Je ne troublerai pas l'onde mystérieuse:
Nymphes! si vous m'aimez, il faut toujours dormir!
La moindre âme dans l'air vous fait toutes frémir;
Même, dans sa faiblesse, aux ombres échappée,
Si la feuille éperdue effleure la napée.
Elle suffit à rompre un univers dormant...
Votre sommeil importe à mon enchantement,
Il craint jusqu'au frisson d'une plume qui plonge!
Gardez-moi longuement ce visage pour songe
Qu'une absence divine est seule à concevoir!
Sommeil des nymphes, ciel, ne cessez de me voir!

Rêvez, rêvez de moi!...Sans vous, belles fontaines,
Ma beauté, ma douleur, me seraient incertaines.
Je chercherais en vain ce que j'ai de plus cher,
Sa tendresse confuse étonnerait ma chair,
Et mes tristes regards, ignorants de mes charmes.
A d'autres qu moi-même adresseraient leurs larmes...

Vous attendiez, peut-être, un visage sans pleurs,
Vous calmes, vous toujours de feuilles et de fleurs,
Et de l'incorruptible altitude hantées,
O nymphes!...Mais docile aux pentes enchantées
Qui me firent vers vous d'invincibles chemins,
Souffrez ce beau reflet des désordres humains!

Heureux vos corps fondus, Eaux planes et profondes!
Je suis seul!...Si les Dieux, les échos et les ondes
Et si tant de soupirs permettent qu'on le soit!
Seul!...mais encor celui qui s'approche de soi
Quand il s'approche aux bords que bénit ce feuillage...

Des cimes, l'air déjà cesse le pur pillage;
"Np" --La voix des sources change, et me parle du soir;
--Un grand calme m'écoute, où j'écoute l'espoir.
--J'entends l'herbe des nuits croître dans l'ombre sainte,
--Et la lune perfide élève son miroir
--Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte...
Jusque dans les secrets que je crains de savoir,
Jusque dans le repli de l'amour de soi-même,
Rien ne peut échapper au silence du soir...
La nuit vient sur ma chair lui souffler que je l'aime.
Sa voix fraîche à mes voeux tremble de consentir;
A peine, dans la brise, elle semble mentir,
Tant le frémissement de son temple tacite
Conspire au spacieux silence d'un tel site.

O douceur de survivre à la force du jour,
Quand elle se retire enfin rose d'amour,
Encore un peu brûlante, et lasse, mais comblée,
Et de tant de trésors tendrement accablée
Par de tels souvenirs qu'ils empourprent sa mort,
Et qu'ils la font heureuse agenouiller dans l'or,
Puis s'étendre, se fondre, et perdre sa vendange,
Et s'éteindre en un songe en qui le soir se change.

Quelle perte en soi-même offre un si calme lieu!
L'âme, jusqu'à périr, s'y penche pour un Dieu
Qu'elle demande à l'onde, onde déserte, et digne
Sur son lustre, du lisse effacement d'un cygne...
A cette onde jamais ne burent les troupeaux!
D'autres, ici perdus, trouveraient le repos,
Et dans la sombre terre, un clair tombeau qui s'ouvre...
Mais ce n'est pas le calme, hélas! que j'y découvre!
Quand l'opaque délice où dort cette clarté,
Cède à mon corps l'horreur du feuillage écarté,
Alors, vainqueur de l'ombre, ô mon corps tyrannique,
Repoussant aux forêts leur épaisseur panique,
Tu regrettes bientôt leur éternelle nuit!
Pour l'inquiet Narcisse, il n'est ici qu'ennui!
Tout m'appelle et m'enchaîne à la chair lumineuse
Que m'oppose des eaux la paix vertigineuse!

"Np" --Que de déplore ton éclat fatal et pur,
--Si mollement de moi, fontaine environnée,
--Où puisèrent mes yeux dans un mortel azur,
Les yeux mêmes et noirs de leur âme etonnée!

Profondeur, profondeur, songes qui me voyez,
Comme ils verraient une autre vie,
Dites, ne suis-je pas celui que vous croyex,
Votre corps vous fait-il envie?

Cessez, sombres esprits, cet ouvrage anxieux
Qui se fait dans l'âme qui veille;
Ne cherchez pas en vous, n'allez suprendre aux cieux
Le malheur d'être une merveille:
Trouvez dans la fontaine un corps délicieux...

Prenant à vos regards cette parfaite proie,
Du monstre de s'aimer faites-vous un captif;
Dans les errants filets des vos longs cils de soie
Son gracieux éclat vous retienne pensif;

Mais ne vous flattez pas de le changer d'empire.
Ce cristal est son vrai séjour;
Les efforts mêmes de l'amour!
Ne le sauraient de l'onde extraire qu'il n'expire...

PIRE.
Pire?...
Quelqu'un redit Pire...O moqueur!
Echo lointaine est prompte à rendre son oracle
De son rire enchanté, le roc brise mon coeur,
Et le silence, par miracle,
Cesse!...parle, renaît, sur la face des eaux...

Pire?...
Pire destin!...Vous le dites, roseaux,
Qui reprîtes des vents ma plainte vagabonde!
Antres, qui me rendez mon âme plus profonde,
Vous renflez de votre ombre une voix qui se meurt...
Vous me le murmurez, ramures!...O rumeur
Déchirante, et docile aux souffles sans figure,
Votre or léger s'agite, et joue avec l'augure...
Tout se mêle de moi, brutes divinités!
Mes secrets dans les airs sonnent ébruités,
Le roc rit; l'arbre pleure; et par sa voix charmante,
Je ne puis jusqu'aux cieux que je ne me lamente
D'appartenir sans force à d'éternels attraits!

"Np" --Hélas! entre les bras qui naissent des forêts,
--Une tendre lueur d'heure ambiguë existe...
--Là, d'un reste du jour, se forme un fiancé,
--Nu, sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste,
--Délicieux démon désirable et glacé!

--Te voici, mon doux corps de lune et de rosée,
--O forme obéissante à mes yeux opposée!
--Qu'ils sont beaux, de mes bras les dons vastes et vains!
--Mes lentes mains, dans l'or adorable se lassent
--D'appeller ce captif que les feuilles enlacent;
--Mon coeur jette aux échos l'éclat des noms divins!...

Mais que ta bouche est belle en ce muet blasphème!

O semblable!...Et pourtant plus parfait que moi-même,
Ephémère immortel, si clair devant mes yeux,
Pâles membres de perle, et ces cheveux soyeux,
Faut-il qu'à peine aimés, l'ombre les obscurcisse,
Et que la nuit déjà nous divise, ô Narcisse,
Et glisse entre nous deux le fer qui coupe un fruit!
Qu'as-tu?
Ma plainte même est funeste?...
Le bruit
Du souffle que j'enseigne à tes lèvres, mon double,
Sur la limpide lame a fait courir un trouble!...
Tu trembles!...Mais ces mots que j'expire à genoux
Ne sont pourtant qu'une âme hésitante entre nous,
Entre ce front si pur et ma lourde mémoire...
Je suis si près de toi que je pourrais te boire,
O visage!...Ma soif est un esclave nu...
Jusqu'à ce temps charmant je m'étais inconnu,
Et je ne savais pas me chérir et me joindre!
Mais te voir, cher esclave, obéir à la moindre
Des ombres dans mon coeur se fuyant à regret,
Voir sur mon front l'orage et les feux d'un secret,
Voir, ô merveille, voir! ma bouche nuancée
Trahir...peindre sur l'onde une fleur de pensée,
Et quels événements étinceler dans l'oeil!
J'y trouve un tel trésor d'impuissance et d'orgueil,
Que nulle vierge enfant échappée au satyre,
Nulle! aux fuites habiles, aux chutes sans émoi,
Nulle des nymphes, nulle amie, ne m'attire
Comme tu fais sur l'onde, inépuisable Moi!...
(O, I, 122-126).

Because the first fragment in its final form is more than twice as long as it was originally, the role of "Narcisse parle" is considerably diminished. Only nineteen lines remain and several of these have been altered. Even in its reduced state, however, Valéry's continued reuse of "Narcisse parle" is of considerable interest since it allows for significant and revealing points of comparison which illustrate Valéry's evolving poetic theory.

The first significant change, not already discussed, is an excellent example of one of Valéry's chief concerns at the time of Charmes, a very deliberate attention to poetic devices. Although four lines of "Narcisse parle," used in early versions of the first "Fragment," were dropped for the final version, they were replaced by the poetic amplification of another line from "Narcisse parle." "Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte" was originally followed by the four line sequence from "Narcisse parle" beginning "Et moi! De tout mon coeur dans ces roseaux jeté." In the final version the lines read as follows:

> Jusque dans les secrets de la fontaine éteinte...
> Jusque dans les secrets que je crains de savoir,
> Jusque dans le repli de l'amour de soi-même,

By using anaphora, Valéry effectively intensifies the focus on self. By a slight variation he modifies, ever so subtly, the third line of the anaphoric sequence. The

use of "repli" to replace "secrets" is unexpected but fitting. It means the same thing,[55] therefore, it is more the same than if the word "secrets" had merely been repeated once again as anticipated. In addition, the idea of a fold evoked by "repli" is an apt image for the turning inward of self-love, which is itself a fearful secret hidden in the depths of self.

The four line sequence beginning "Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur" (ll. 72-75), undergoes no modification; however, it is displaced and isolated from the other lines of "Narcisse parle" with which it had originally been grouped. The new disposition of the lines demonstrates once again Valéry's penchant for revision through regrouping. Reference to the changes in the lines from "Hélas! entre les bras qui naissent des forêts," to "Délicieux démon désirable et glacé!" (l. 110-114) has already been made. (See footnote 53.)

One final group of lines borrowed from "Narcisse parle" appeared in the first version of the "Fragment" in the following form.

> Voici dans l'eau ma chair de lune et de rosée
> O forme obéissante à mes voeux opposée
> Voici mes bras d'argent dont les gestes sont purs!...
> Mes lentes mains dans l'or adorable se lassent
> D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent
> Et je crie aux échos les noms des dieux obscurs!

In the final version, the lines became:

> Te voici, mon doux corps de lune et de rosée,
> O forme obéissante à mes yeux opposée!
> Qu'ils sont beaux, de mes bras les dons vastes
> et vaines!
> Mes lentes mains, dans l'or adorable se lassent
> D'appeler ce captif que les feuilles enlacent;
> Mon coeur jette aux échos l'éclat des noms
> divins!... (ll. 115-20).

The change in the second line from "voeux" to "yeux" is a reversion to an earlier form. The most significant modifications occur in the third line and in the final line. The syntax of the third line, radically altered, is unusual and, consequently, more poetic, but its meaning is not measurably obscured. "Bras" is still emphasized, perhaps even more so, coming now at the caesura; "beaux" is also stressed, both by its position and because it is part of an exclamatory phrase. "Dons" replaces "dont" in terms of sound and "gestes" in terms of meaning. It is infinitely more expressive. The loss of "argent" is advantageous, since it avoids a possible inconsistency with respect to "or" in the following line. The demands of rhyme may have caused some of the changes in these two lines, especially in the last line. The line could no longer end with "obscurs" since it was necessary to have a word rhyming with "vains."

In the last line, the harsh "c" sounds of the synecdoche "coeur" and the words "échos" and "éclat" may suggest the angry frustration of Narcissus at this point, but this "cry" from the heart hurled at the gods is more important as a "muet blasphème" as the next line

indicates: "Mais que ta bouche est belle en ce muet blasphème!" Consequently, the line in its revised form is more fitting than "Et je crie aux échos les noms des dieux obscurs! The word "éclat" found in the revised line, poetically linked to other parts of the poem by repetition,[56] may imply sound or light or both. Its ambiguity is particularly useful here. The internal (in the heart) "muet blasphème," having no real auditory reflection is inaudible, but it echoes visually, in a sense, since the expression of the mouth ("ta bouche... en ce muet blasphème") reflects it on the water in the still lingering light.

Before concluding this analysis of the role of "Narcisse parle" vis-à-vis the development of the "Fragments du Narcisse," two additional questions need to be considered which bear upon other important aspects of Valéry's theory of poetry: Valéry's possible debt to Ovid, and the problem of influence.

Questionable Sources

In the first chapter, I demonstrated that the question of influence was crucial to "Narcisse parle." The full story of the early Narcissus poem could not have been told without establishing the debt Valéry owed to others. In particular, it was possible to illustrate that four literary figures demonstrably affected not only "Narcisse parle" but Valéry's ideas on poetry as well.

The roles played by Gide and Huysmans, and especially Mallarmé and Poe, were an integral part of the story of "Narcisse parle" and offered valuable insight into Valéry's early poetic theory. In his early years, Valéry, like most fledgling poets, was impressionable and imitative. The story which unfolds with respect to the poetry of the "Fragments" is almost totally different. By this time, Valéry has reached poetic maturity. He has, for example, rid himself of many of the superficial trappings of Symbolism (this has already been borne out by comparison with "Narcisse parle"). There are, however, several important figures who are repeatedly mentioned when "Fragments du Narcisse" is analyzed. Certain names come up again and again, names like Hugo and Racine, for instance. The focus of such comparisons usually is and probably can only be of a general nature rather than as specific and particular as it was with "Narcisse parle." The mature poet of Charmes admires what is best in Hugo and finally has come to appreciate Racine's supreme poetic skill, but it is probably neither a question of imitation nor, for that matter, of direct influence. By this time, Valéry has evolved his own practice and theory. Nevertheless, since the names of the great French Romantic poets, Hugo, Vigny, Lamartine, and Musset as well as such giants of poetry as Lucretius, Ronsard, and Racine and less frequently, but perhaps more reasonably, Leonardo da Vinci,

are mentioned in connection with Valéry's "Fragments du Narcisse," it is useful to look, at least briefly, at the reasons for drawing such parallels. What, if anything, do these comparisons reveal about Valéry's poetry at this stage, even if it is primarily by way of contrast?

Almost invariably French Romantic poets are cited when "Fragments du Narcisse" is analyzed. In particular, the second fragment is often compared with Hugo's "Tristesse d'Olympio." Lawler, for instance, sees the overall thematic similarities in the description of the extreme sadness of past love remembered:

> Le nostalgique ne trouve que douleur en tout ce qui une fois sembla si beau: la faiblesse a remplacé le sentiment de pouvoir et de domination, les trésors sont devenus des tombeaux. Ce thème est bien sûr l'un des plus populaires de la poésie romantique--Lamartine dans "L'Isolement" et Hugo dans "Tristesse d'Olympio" lui donnent son expression la plus connue....[57]

Lawler suggests that Valéry's art surpasses that of the Romantic poets: ". . . mais les vers de Valéry nous apparaissent à la fois plus simples et plus concentrés; la musicalité, la tendresse, l'amertume sont merveilleusement rendues sans emphase."[58]

Generally conceding the superiority of Valéry's work, a number of other writers have observed the similarities between Valéry's "Fragments" and famous French Romantic poems. Focusing on the fountain of the second

fragment, Roland Derche observes: "Mais 'froidement présente,/ Douce aux purs animaux, aux humains complaisante,' la fontaine est bien celle d'Ovide, évoquée avec des accents qui vont rappeler tout à la fois de façon assez imprévue la 'Tristesse d'Olympio' de Victor Hugo et le 'Souvenir' de Musset."[59] In a similar vein, but alluding to Lamartine rather than Musset, Pierre Michel comments:

> Sur l'enivrement de la passion et sur sa fragilité, thème si souvent repris par les poètes romantiques, Valéry a composé deux développements symétriques sobres et amers; le plaisir d'aimer vite dissipé par le Temps, les retours dans les lieux témoins des extases passées, les regrets, les désirs de caresses, les instincts de meurtre sont évoqués tour à tour dans un mouvement qui ne le cède pas au Lac de Lamartine ou à la Tristesse d'Olympio, avec moins de souffle mais plus d'intensité: le poète n'a pas les consolations de la foi dans l'éternité.[60]

In a manuscript analysis of the second fragment, Eva Maria Gerstel notes an important difference in approach between Valéry and the Romantic poets, one which must not be overlooked. "Nature is neither sympathetic as in Musset or Hugo, nor indifferent as in Vigny, but a mirror reflecting truth and destroying illusion."[61] Consequently, the treatment is satisfyingly different, although the subject itself is trite. Fowlie, also underscoring the likeness of the "Fragments" to Hugo's poem, mentions Valéry's reason for working with such a stale

theme: "The lovers' desires and natures are fused in this passage that quite literally reproduces a major theme in Hugo's 'Tristesse d'Olympio.' Valéry acknowledged that he wrote this passage of the second fragment as a challenge to himself: to write in accordance with a rigorous art lines that seem easy."[62] The role of exercise in Valéry's poetic canon has already been established in this study. Quoting Valéry in his edition of Charmes, Robert Monestier reiterates this important idea:

> Fragment II. Vers 1-82. La fontaine a été témoin de bien des drames et de bien des ivresses d'amour suivies de déception et d'amertume. Ce thème est fréquent chez les romantiques et d'une banalité qui surprend chez Valéry: mais il a voulu, d'après une lettre à Guy Lavaud, "reprendre ce thème facile, pour s'exercer dans l'art très difficile du vers facile d'aspect."[63]

The result of this type of endeavor is that the subject, in this case, the lover returning to a scene in nature witness to his earlier love affair, is of minor consequence. It is the poetry itself which takes precedence, as Valéry intended.

The consensus among critics seems to be that Valéry's treatment of the theme surpasses even the great achievements of the Romantic poets. The cold realism and utter lack of sentiment in Valéry's approach, however, make it apparent that his general outlook on love and his overall poetic aims were vastly different from those of

the Romantic poets. Numerous other dissimilarities could easily be detailed. Consequently, such comparisons as those quoted above and their subsequent value judgments tend to be vague and meaningless. Perpetrating the same tedious refrain over and over again, i.e. Valéry's "Fragments" is like Hugo's "Tristesse," usually made with little or no amplification or meaningful explanation, contributes little if anything to our fuller appreciation of Valéry.

Also difficult to assess precisely is the alleged Racinian quality which appears in Valéry's poetry from the time of La Jeune Parque. This is seen, for instance, in the classical rigor and control visible in Valéry's verse and in his very serious attention to form. At the beginning of his analysis of the second fragment, Alain refers to a Racinian trait in Valéry's work. In a comparison which also refers to Hugo's poem, Tristesse d'Olympio, he observes:

> Ici, en un bel épisode, l'amour et les amants. C'est le thème de la Tristesse d'Olympio, mais cela passe de loin tout ce que j'ai lu, sur l'ivresse et sur le regret. Cette poésie-ci se cache, fidèle au mouvement racinien.[64]

Valéry's interest in Racine, at first very slight and even deprecatory, has by the time of the "Fragments" grown to a very genuine admiration. As MacKay points out in The Universal Self, two different incidents had helped to focus Valéry's attention on Racine:

> The first was a report, in an article by Adolphe Brisson in Le Temps, of a brochure by Prince George of Prussia, which gave a careful analysis of the range and musical effect of the voice of Rachel in the plays of Racine. Here every detail of the great actress's diction was considered, even to the length of pauses, and the rhythm of her breathing. Valéry had found this article quite by chance, when, discouraged by the difficulties of his work, he had gone for a walk, and stopping at a café had picked up a copy of Le Temps.... This had awakened Valéry's interest in the musical qualities of Racine's verse.[65]

A second circumstance which introduced Valéry to study Racine occurred about the time when Valéry was writing La Jeune Parque. MacKay notes that Valéry refers to this particular incident in a letter to André Fontainas.

> A strange thing, the influence of the children's lessons: making them recite the dream of Athalie taught me the most unsuspected things- which at once solved all the difficulties to which I was a prey.[66]

It certainly is not surprising that Valéry became seriously interested in classical verse given the attention he paid to all of the technical means and conventions of the art in order to make poetry more poetic. Due to his emphasis on music, rhythm, and the careful placement and interrelation of words, it is perfectly natural that he should admire Racine's great talent. Evelyn Suhami explains it this way:

> Le poète est donc très sensible à l'harmonie de la langue: c'est par la musique qu'il accède à la poésie. Ceci explique l'immense admiration de Valéry pour Racine, parfait musicien du vers; il demeure émerveillé devant cette mélodie subtilement modulée, et discrètement pure; il apprend à l'écouter mieux....[67]

Walzer considers that Valéry has captured this Racinian music in the second fragment.

> Ce second "fragment" malgré ce titre, est un morceau parfaitement construit, magnifiquement achevé, qui fait entendre, dans le déroulement régulier de ses alexandrins à rime plate... une musique racinienne plus pure que jamais.[68]

That Valéry was keenly aware of Racine's superior poetic achievement is apparent in the following story:

> Il y a peu d'années, j'ai composé le livret d'une cantate, et l'ai dû faire assez vite, en alexandrins. J'ai laissé ce travail, un jour, pour me rendre à l'Académie, et, la tête encore occupée du mouvement d'une période, me suis trouvé distraitement arrêté devant une vitrine du quai où était exposée une belle page de vers, en grand format et beaux caractères. Il se fit alors un singulier échange entre moi-même et ce morceau de noble architecture. J'eus l'impression d'être encore devant mon ébauche, et je me mis inconsciemment, pendant une longue fraction de minute, à essayer, sur le texte affiché, des changements de termes... J'étais comme un sculpteur qui mettrait ses mains sur un marbre, rêvant qu'il remaniât une terre encore humide et molle.

> Mais le texte ne se laissait pas ressaisir. Phèdre me résistait. Je connus par expérience directe et sensation immédiate ce que c'est que la perfection d'un ouvrage. Ce ne fut pas un bon réveil.[69]

This incident must have happened when Valéry was working on the Cantate du Narcisse around 1937-38. Given Valéry's strongly held conviction that a poem is never finished, and always open to modification and improvement, Valéry is paying Racine the ultimate compliment.

In his study of the "Fragments" Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin very succinctly outlines Valéry's poetic evolution to this point, understanding his aims and capturing the essence of his interest in Racine.

> Valéry n'avait pas seulement reconnu, dans ce mythe, des possibilités nouvelles d'expression; il y a vu une matière favorable à l'exercise d'aptitudes poétiques nouvelles, conformes à une évolution de son goût vers une pureté quasi-racinienne.
>
> Il venait, sur le tard, de découvrir Racine, "à l'occasion de quelques minuscules et immenses problèmes de l'art des vers." Et nulle part sans doute il n'a frôlé de plus près la simplicité de chant qu'il lui enviait:

> Rêvez, rêvez de moi!... Sans vous, belles fontaines,
> Ma beauté, ma douleur me seraient incertaines,
> Je chercherais en vain ce que j'ai de plus cher...

> Voici Valéry parvenu peu à peu, à travers l'apprentissage et l'éblouissement mallarméens, à travers le dur travail de la Jeune Parque, à la grande pureté classique.[70]

The frequent allusions to Racine-like qualities in Valéry's work seem to have merit and tend to be more revealing than the very general comparisons which have been made between Valéry and the Romantic poets. Priscilla Shaw contends that most critics refer at some time or other to Racine in their discussion of Valéry because of the remarkable similarity of tone, vocabulary and metrical phrasing discernible in many lines and pervasive in the Narcissus poems.[71] What she says is true, but it does not go far enough. The theoretical considerations made by Valéry in frequent references to Racine's art are the real key to understanding the Racine/Valéry question.[72] A very specific and detailed analysis of lines of poetry written by Valéry which seem to reflect Racinian characteristics studied in close conjunction with what Valéry has written about Racine's work would be productive and should be attempted in order to evaluate accurately the scope and depth of Valéry's possible debt to Racine.[73]

Attentive to the melodious purity of the second "fragment," Michael Décaudin mentions not only Racine, but also Lucretius: "Ici c'est de la fontaine qu'il apprendra la vanité de l'amour. Le ton se fait plus âpre, à la fois pessimiste et sensuel. Valéry s'inspire librement d'un passage célèbre de Lucrèce; mais c'est surtout à Racine qu'on pense devant la pureté mélodieuse

de passage...."[74] The name of Lucretius is brought up in connection with the "Fragments" nearly as often as that of Hugo and Racine.

It was Alain who first likened Valéry to Lucretius. He begins his annotation of "Fragments du Narcisse" as follows: "Paul Valéry est notre Lucrèce. Il voit les choses comme elles sont et ne les veut point autres."[75] Later he adds: "On dit que Lucrèce était un homme triste. Sûrement notre Lucrèce est un homme triste."[76] When he comes to the lines: "Moins amers les parfums des suprêmes fumées/ Qu'abandonnent au vent les feuilles consumées!..." he again alludes to Lucretius. "Ici encore je sens le parfum de Lucrèce; et je désire que Valéry traduise Lucrèce, en vers, et mot à mot. Lui seul le peut."[77]

Following Alain's lead, others continue to compare Valéry to Lucretius. Pierre Michel mentions it in two separate studies dealing with the "Fragments." In one of them, he merely reiterates Alain;[78] in the other, he contends that Valéry's passage on love in the second "fragment," reflects Valéry's own personal philosophy of life and love which he feels is like Lucretius' and Vigny's:

> Dans le second Fragment, Mallarmé fait place à Lucrèce et à Vigny; les tentations de la mort, les ardeurs et les désillusions de l'amour inspirent à Valéry des vers âpres et denses, dans lesquels son pessimisme et sa sensualité se révèlent sans masque; ce n'est

> plus l'éphèbe antique qui parle, mais l'homme moderne déçu par la vie, sans idéal religieux, trop lucide pour se laisser abuser par la comédie humaine.[79]

Valéry no doubt admired Lucretius: the latter's rejection of romantic love, his scepticism, the vitality of his descriptive powers, the rhythm and grace of his hexameters, his knowledge of and attention to poetic conventions, all of these would certainly appeal to Valéry. However, De Rerum Natura is more than just a great literary achievement; it is, without a doubt, the supreme didactic poem of classical antiquity. While appreciating Lucretius' large poetic gifts, Valéry, who eschewed systems and dogmatism in life as well as in poetry, would not have condoned the use of poetry as a medium for proselytizing for Epicureanism or any philosophy, for that matter. Consequently, the whole assumption of the Valéry/Lucretius comparison, as it generally is made, poses a problem. Valéry would neither acknowledge nor appreciate the title philosopher/poet so readily associated with Lucretius. Certainly such a designation does not fit Valéry. As far as he was concerned, the introduction of philosophy into poetry, like the introduction of narration, or even description, caused poetry to be prose-like and, therefore, impure.

Valéry mentions De Rerum Natura in a discussion in which he warns against looking for the poet's real

philosophy in his poems and suggests that it is impossible to successfully introduce philosophy into poetry:

> Tout véritable poète est bien plus capable que l'on ne le sait en général, de raisonnement juste et pensée abstraite.
>
> Mais il ne faut pas chercher sa philosophie réelle dans ce qu'il dit de plus ou moins philosophique. A mon avis, la plus authentique philosophie n'est pas dans les objets de notre réflexion, tant que dans l'acte même de la pensée et dans sa manoeuvre....[80]

Recalling that poets have often used poetry to expound a philosophy, he adds:

> De très grands poètes s'y sont parfois essayés. Mais, quel que soit le talent qui se dépense dans ces entreprises très nobles, il ne peut faire que l'attention portée à suivre les idées ne soit pas en concurrence avec elle qui suit le chant. Le DE NATVRA RERVM est ici en conflit avec la nature des choses. L'état du lecteur de poèmes n'est pas l'état du lecteur de pures pensées. L'état de l'homme qui danse n'est pas celui de l'homme qui s'avance dans un pays difficile dont il fait le levé topographique et la prospection géologique.[81]

Thus Valéry may find the philosopher/poet combination incongruous, even impossible, but to the extent that he saw Lucretius as a poet of knowledge, he would have appreciated being compared with him. In "Au Sujet d'Eurêka," he touches on this idea:

> Notre poésie ignore, ou même redoute, tout l'épique et le pathétique de l'intellect. Que si quelquefois elle s'y est risquée, elle s'est faite morne et assommante. Lucrèce, ni Dante, ne sont Français. Nous n'avons point chez nous de poètes de la connaissance. Peut-être avons nous un sentiment si marqué de la distinction des genres, c'est-à-dire de l'indépendance des divers mouvements de l'esprit, que nous ne souffrons point les ouvrages qui les combinent. Nous ne savons pas faire chanter ce qui peut se passer de chant [. . .] (O, I, 856).

He indicated that he felt French poetry was, in fact, capable of such a feat.[82] In La Jeune Parque and in the Narcissus poems, primarily "Fragments du Narcisse," he succeeds magnificently in putting the theory into practice. For Valéry, the life of the intellect constituted an incomparable lyric universe, a complete drama with a full range of human qualities.[83]

Finally, the point has been made, understandably, that Valéry's and Lucretius' ideas on love were the same, indicating in this way, that Lucretius influenced Valéry. Roland Derche notes in passing: "Narcisse rappelle les amours dont la fontaine a été le témoin; --avec des accents dignes de Lucrèce, il montre 'du sombre amour' 'la tourments,' puis il signale 'Quels fruits forment toujours ces moments enchantés:' mensonges, decéptions, regrets, mélancolie des souvenirs...."[84] On this subject Walzer makes the most direct comparison

citing specific lines (1105-1111) and the famous "amari aliquid" (1133-34) from Book IV of the De Rerum Natura:

> Pour la peinture de l'étreinte des corps, peinture dure, directe, précise, débarrassée de toute indication sentimentale ou mythique, un seul poète est comparable à Valéry: c'est Lucrèce en son quatrième livre.[85]

Indeed there may be similarities between the two poets (Walzer also underscores "the same bitterness" and "the same scientific eye").[86] Yet, if Valéry owes a specific debt to anyone on the subject of love, it is more likely Leonardo da Vinci. Valéry comments specifically on Leonardo's drawings in "Note et Digression," the preface to "Introduction à la Méthode de Leonard de Vinci"[87] and then adds in the "Marginalia:" "Ce regard assez froid sur la mécanique de l'amour est unique, je crois, dans l'histoire intellectuelle."[88] He adds what might very well be regarded as a commentary on the effect on the reader, as well as on the poet himself, of his approach to love in the second "fragment" (ll. 23-82):

> L'amour analysé froidement, une foule d'idées étranges viennent à l'esprit. Quels détours, quelle complexité de moyens pour accomplir la fécondation! Les émotions, les idéaux, la beauté intervenant comme conditions de l'excitation de certain muscle.
>
> L'essentiel de la fonction devenant accessoire; et son accomplissement redouté, éludé...
>
> Rien ne fait mieux observer à quel point la nature est indirecte.[89]

Gerstel makes one of the few references to this possible source: "It is well-known that Valéry studied the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci which include graphic studies of the act of love."[90] Showing how Valéry recorded the external aspects of love making as a pure physiological phenomenon in his Cahiers (t. 7, p. 627 and t. 9, p. 321), Gerstel contends that lines 25-41 of the second "fragment" are a poetic transposition of his prose observations with the lyricism lessening the clinical aspect.[91]

While discussing the "Fragments," other parallels might be considered: Valéry and LaFontaine,[92] for instance, or Valéry and Rilke. Of course, influence on Valéry is not at all in question with respect to Rilke, but comparison as in Shaw's book: Rilke, Valéry and Yeats, the Domain of the Self, tends to shed considerable light on Valéry's poetic method.[93]

In each case of comparison discussed so far, further study and closer analysis, especially with reference to specific lines, would undoubtedly yield even more helpful details about Valéry's theory of poetry and the role of the "Fragments" in his development.[94] One additional comparison which has been made, between Ronsard and Valéry, leads directly into the study of the elements Valéry borrowed from the Metamorphoses for use in the "Fragments."

Ovidian Elements

Setting up his comparison of Ronsard's "La mort de Narcisse" and Valéry's "Fragments," Jean Soulairol asks: "Valéry a-t-il jamais connu 'La mort de Narcisse,' en forme d'élégie, que Ronsard a placée après son Elégie IX et qu'il a dédiée à Jean Daurat, son précepteur?"[95] He decides that there are "des points de contact certains."[96] While some of his very general observations seem valid enough, it is precisely when Soulairol describes these "points of certain contact" that his case is extremely weak, if not faulty. For example, he draws the following parallel. Quoting Ronsard's lines - "Nulle Nymphe voisine ou boeuf ou pastoureau,/ Ny du haut d'un buisson la chute d'un rameau,/ Ny sanglier embourbé n'avoyent son eau troublée...," he asks, "comment ne songerions-nous pas à l'onde valéryenne: '. . . onde déserte, et digne./ Sur son lustre, du lisse effacement d'un cygne.../ A cette onde jamais ne burent les troupeaux!'"[97] Looking back at Ovid's lines we find: "Quem neque pastores neque pastae mont capellae/ Contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris/ Nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus" (ll. 408-410). Obviously Ronsard's lines are closer to Ovid's in vocabulary, in structure, using essentially the same negative development. Valéry's economy of expression gives the essence of the idea but his expression of it differs considerably from both Ronsard's

and Ovid's.[98]

In Ronsard's lines beginning "Quantes-fois pour-néant, de sa lèvre approchée" to ". . . si tu verses parmi/ L'onde un pleur seulement, tu perdras ton ami," Soulairol sees "toute la structure phénoménale du Narcisse de Valéry."[99] This observation is followed by his next direct comparison which he prefaces as follows: "Mais voici une chose plus précise, qui nous introduit à la deuxième partie du poème valéryen:

> Hé vistes-vous jamais, bien que soyez âgées
> D'une infinité d'ans, amours si enragées?
> Vous le sçavez, forests, car mainte et mainte fois
> Vous avez recélé les amans sous vos bois."[100]

With the preceding lines from Ronsard's poem, he compares Valéry's lines beginning "Fontaine, ma fontaine, eau froidement présente,/ Douce aux purs animaux, aux humains complaisante,/ Onde sur qui les ans passent comme les nues,/ Que de choses pourtant doivent t'être connues . . . ." Ronsard's Narcissus has addressed the forest just as Ovid's Narcisse did: "'Etquis, io silvae, crudelius' inquit 'amavit?'" (l. 442). Valéry, on the other hand, has made a significant departure consistent with his own symbolism. In Valéry's poem, Narcissus addresses the fountain, as the symbol of memory, an aspect of mind.[101] While Valéry may have been aware of Ronsard's poem and undoubtedly knew the details of Ovid's account, he renders ideas common to both Ronsard and Ovid in his own way, transforming them artistically to suit his own aims.

Earlier in relation to "Narcisse parle," Valéry's fundamental lack of debt to Ovid's Metamorphoses was established. While it was possible to see in "Narcisse parle" certain relatively minor elements from Ovid's poem such as similarities in setting and vocabulary and the subtle use by Valéry of the transformation myth, it was clear that Valéry did not borrow extensively or significantly from the Metamorphoses in constructing "Narcisse parle."

The Narcissus of the "Fragments," like the hero of "Narcisse parle," is a lucid, non-Ovidian hero. Ovid's story describes Narcissus all the way from conception and birth to death including references to his funeral and his existence after death. Once again, however, Valéry is not interested in the narrative scope of Ovid's tale but prefers instead to focus on a brief, critical moment in Narcissus' life. One important reason for Valéry's telescoped interpretation of the myth, emphasizing the moment of encounter is that, on one level, Valéry is presenting a complex personal problem, one of intellectual rather than emotional consequence, and transposing it aesthetically by embodying it symbolically in ancient myth. In the "Fragments," Valéry figuratively expresses his own personal quest to know the mind absolutely. His main concern in poetry, however, is the means and, consequently, the poem is not primarily, or even essentially, an abstract

meditation on self, but is instead a serious exercise in the art of poetry. His intentions preclude the necessity of telling the whole story of Narcissus. Yet, he does borrow, selectively, some important details from Ovid with interesting consequences for the "Fragments."

Curiously enough the first version of the "Fragments" owed even less to Ovid's account than "Narcisse parle" did. There is little to link the earliest version of Valéry's poem with the Metamorphoses except for Narcissus himself and one specific line: "A cette onde jamais ne burent les troupeaux!" This line, already referred to in the Ronsard comparison, expresses in compressed fashion an idea developed by Ovid in several lines (ll. 407-12).

By the time of the final version of the "Fragments," however, the picture has changed considerably. First of all, Valéry has reintroduced and amplified the very short sequence on the nymphs found in "Narcisse parle" (ll. 3-4): "Et vers vous, Nymphe, Nymphe, ô Nymphe des fontaines,/ Je viens au pur silence offrir mes larmes vaines." In the "Fragments," the lines are expanded (ll. 7-16 and 26-28), beginning "Nymphes! si vous m'aimez, il faut toujours dormir." The references to nymphs bring to mind Narcissus' background as told by Ovid (ll. 341-346) who recalls that the nymph Liriope was the mother of Narcissus.

More importantly, Valéry introduces Echo and, also, substantially increases other allusions taken from Ovid's

poem, some minor, others relatively important, at least poetically.

As an epigraph for the poem, Valéry uses a line from Ovid. It is not from the Metamorphoses, but is found instead in Ovid's Tristia, Book II. The ironic question posed in the terse phrase "Cur aliquid vidi?" announces the lucid and tragic tone of the poem. It is precisely the right question, fitting for both Valéry and Narcissus to ask, given the frustrating impossibility of their reaching their goal. Though the question comes from the Tristia it evokes the Metamosphoses since it is so reminiscent of Tiresias' dire prophecy concerning Narcissus: "si se non noverit."

When Ovid wrote the Tristia, he was in forced exile. Valéry, like Narcissus, existed in a kind of willed exile cut off from real life by a specific, all encompassing pursuit: to know the mind. While it is certainly true that Valéry participated quite fully in the so-called "real world,"[102] on the intellectual level his devotion to his quest was as intense and determined as Narcissus' was. Valéry's situation, too, was lonely and fraught with frustration. No absolute satisfaction was possible as he well knew. Valéry's Cahiers, which he felt were his only real work, written each day when he was alone in the early dawn hours, are a testament to his seriousness and persistence. They demonstrate his

total absorption with looking endlessly into the mirror of the intellectual self to discover everything possible related to the mind, its capacity and the way it functions. Therefore, it is quite easy to relate Valéry's personal quest to the poem and to conclude that on the symbolic level, the poem, beginning even with the epigraph, suggests that the soul "seeing something" (as Narcissus sees his image reflected in the fountain), and confronted with the choice of profound self-examination or simply living and loving, chooses absolute self-absorption which is life-annulling and fatal. Consequently, Valéry is able to demonstrate artistically that the search for full consciousness and absolute knowledge was just as impossible to attain as Narcissus' quest to be one with himself was futile. It is important to remember, however, that as far as the poem as poem is concerned, general statements such as the preceding, concerning the symbolic potential of the poem, are of secondary importance to Valéry who, working as he believed Racine did, would rather change Narcissus than write a bad line of poetry. While it does not negate the symbolic possibilities discussed above, Valéry's use of certain details from Ovid tends to underscore, once again, the fact that it is the wish to increase the poetic potential and value of the poem which is essential to Valéry.

After the epigraph, Valéry's next Ovidian allusion,

an indirect one, comes very early in the poem at line two: "Ce soir comme d'un cerf, la fuite vers la source." In Ovid's tale, Narcissus approaches the water's edge after chasing deer in a hunt. Valéry's use of the deer simile is much more purely poetic since, unlike Ovid's reference to the hunt, it does not function as part of the narrative development. It is an example of Valéry's expanded use of figurative language. Paradoxically, it has the added effect of evoking that part of Ovid's story which describes what caused Narcissus to approach the fountain in the first place. As Ovid relates it, Narcissus, thirsty from the chase, is attracted to the water. While he seeks to slake his thirst, another thirst springs up, and he becomes smitten with the image in the water (ll. 413-417). Valéry takes up the thirst motif, but his Narcissus, ever-lucid, knows immediately that his thirst is not a physical one to be appeased by a mere drink of water: "Ma soif me vient abattre au bord même des eaux./ Mais pour désaltérer cette amour curieuse,/ Je ne troublerai pas l'onde mystérieuse" (ll. 4-6). In a sense, for this first part of the poem, Valéry follows Ovid closely, but he does not copy; he transforms the material to suit his own concept of a Narcissus totally aware of his condition.

Perhaps Valéry's most important concession to Ovid's account is the introduction of Echo. Valéry's

wish to increase the musical effects of the poem may well have determined his introduction of the Echo motif with its inherent ability to evoke the idea of reflection in auditory form.

Evelyne Suhami, discussing Valéry's attempts to introduce musical effects into poetry, mentions what she terms his discrete use of "transpositions architecturo-musicales" which she sees in his use of capitalization and italics in La Jeune Parque.[103] Concerning the "Fragments" she adds:

> Valéry combinera cette technique avec un effet d'écho dans les "Fragments du Narcisse:" la nymphe railleuse répond à l'éphèbe attentif qui écoute sa voix de répercuter, de plus en plus 'piano.'"[104]

Quoting Valéry's line:

> PIRE
> Pire?
> Quelqu'un redit pire.. o moqueur!

she comments: "Le vers est construit comme une phrase musicale: thème fort et accentué, réexposé interrogativement avec une altération, repris une fois encore étoffé de quelques notes, jusqu'à la légère résolution finale."[105]

Valéry reworked the disposition of this line several times.[106] Hytier's edition of the OEuvres lists a number of variants. All three times the word "Pire" is in italics in the 1922 edition of Charmes. In the February 1926, edition of Charmes and in Vers et Prose

of January 1926, only the first "Pire" is in italics. Concerning Narcisse (ed. Stols, Anvers, avril 1926), Hytier states: "V. 93: Pire, au début du vers, est en minuscules. Les trois Pire de ce vers et celui du début du vers[98] sont imprimés en rouge (mais non celui de Pire destin)."[107] In the December 1926 edition of Charmes, the first "Pire" is once again in italics.

In the definitive version, the line appears as follows:

PIRE.
Pire?...
Quelqu'un redit Pire... O moqueur!

Rhyming with "expire..." from the preceding line, this line, in its final form, tends to extend visually the echo motif. At line ninety-eight, the word "pire" is echoed again.

Pire?...
Pire destin!... Vous le dites, roseaux,

But the reverberation image, almost exaggerated, finds it most perfect representation in the highly alliterative combination of murmuring echoes of line 102, a calculated alliance of sound and sense, typical of Valéry:

Vous me le murmurez, ramures!... O rumeur

The Echo section begins with the first "Pire" line at ninety-three. Echo is specifically alluded to in line ninety-four: "Echo lointaine est prompte à rendre son oracle." Valéry continues to develop the Echo sequence by such lines as "De son rire enchanté, le roc

brise mon coeur," (l. 95) and the alliterative "le roc rit" of line 107. Valéry's use of pathetic fallacy here, no doubt intentional, subtly introduces a transformation myth used by Ovid, the metamorphosis of Echo into stone. Ovid describes the spurned Echo (ll. 392-402) as living alone in caves.[108] Her cares waste away her wretched form. She becomes gaunt and as the moisture fades from her form into the air, only her voice and her bones remain. Finally, only her voice is perceptible for her bones have turned to stone: "Vox manet; ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram" (l. 399). Echo is a feminine figure in Ovid's myth. The word echo in French, however, is masculine. Valéry makes it feminine (see line 94), desiring perhaps a feminized form of reflection. This usage tends to bring to mind the androgynous references in the early versions of "Narcisse parle." Including the transformation myth, whereby Echo is turned to stone, may also be a subtle allusion to the tombstone of Narcissa, the site of Valéry's first Narcissus poem.[109]

Probably little else in the "Fragments" can be specifically related to Ovid's Metamorphoses. There is, of course, the farewell scene of the third "fragment" found also in "Narcisse parle." Other than the general similarity of tender, anguished "Adieux," nothing of consequence in terms of detail is borrowed from Ovid. The second fragment is noteworthy in that it uses the Narcissus theme to make a commentary on love, as many poets

did in the Middle Ages. Although Valéry's lines on love carry an implicit warning since they are so realistic and without illusion; nevertheless, they are unlike the use of the theme in the Middle Ages because Valéry's approach is so completely undidactic.[110]

Valéry's use of Ovid is calculated in that the elements he borrows are for him a means towards pre-determined poetic effects. Valéry's approach de-emphasizes as much as possible Ovid's narrative, epic qualities. Valéry speaking of Adonis, in particular, and of figures from legend, in general, might well have had his own Narcissus in mind when he wrote:

> Il ne faut pas s'émerveiller de la grande simplicité de ces héros: les principaux personnages d'un poème, ce sont toujours la douceur et la vigueur des vers (O, I, 485).

Up to this point a number of major points concerning Valéry's theory of poetry, as reflected in the "Fragments," have been revealed by means of careful attention to background details; by specific comparison with "Narcisse parle;" in the analysis of similarities and differences shared by Valéry with other poets; and by discussion of the Ovidian elements found within the poem. One major conclusion which may be drawn about Valéry's poetics at this point, is a definite movement away from external, easily observable Symbolist traits and movement towards a readily discernible classical purity and rigor.

Further Poetic Considerations

Before summarizing the other conclusions arrived at in the course of the chapter, it is necessary to take a final look at the "Fragments" in order to underline some additional features of Valéry's theory which have not yet been sufficiently amplified. Since the emphasis will continue to be on theoretical considerations, particularly technical ones, this phase will use representative examples from the poem (in particular, sixteen lines from the first fragment), and will not involve a line by line study of the whole poem.

Two aspects of the poem need to be mentioned briefly first: 1) the first line of the poem, and 2) the question of pure poetry.

Since the first line of the "fragments" has generated so much comment, it is difficult to conclude any study of the poem without taking it into account. Probably more has been written about it than about any other single line of the poem. Its ambiguity and its double significance have been noted.[111] "Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course!" is set off from the rest of the poem. The water, the "terme pur" is Narcissus' goal, both immediate and final. "Pur," meaning absolute in Valéry's lexicon, intimates the fatal outcome. "Brilles," too, is a key word. It introduces the light which is essential to Narcissus' reflection.[112] It is his thirst which brings Narcissus to the edge of the

water. He wishes to quench his "amour curieuse" (l. 5). The first syllable of "curieuse" rhymes with "pur" linking the two lines. "Curieuse" implies a desire to know and hints that this desire is unusual, foreshadowing Narcissus' awareness of his uniqueness emphasized later by : "A cette onde jamais ne burent les troupeaux!" (l. 60). To Fowlie the first line "suspended and separated from the rest of the poem . . . announces both a violent action: 'ma course,' and a perfected or absolute ending ('terme pur') of the action."[113]

The eight lines of poetry which Valéry considered to be his most perfect are a part of the "Fragments." This is another indication of how naturally discussion of all aspects of Valéry's poetic theory follows from examination of the Narcissus poems. I have already mentioned these famous lines which begin "O douceur de survivre à la force du jour," but must add a brief note here because of the importance of the concept of pure poetry to Valéry's poetic theory. By the term pure poetry (which, in a very simplistic way, could be termed that poetry which is devoid of a prose meaning), Valéry explained that he meant absolute poetry, an unattainable ideal to which, nevertheless, the true poet constantly aspires. He discussed the concept throughout his work but mainly in "Calepin d'un poète" (O, I, 1447-56), and in "Poésie pure" (O, I, 1456-64). Hytier, who feels that the notion is quite clear and simple in Valéry's work but obscured by

others, explains the term in La Poétique de Paul Valéry (see especially pages 112-123). He recognizes that the greatest difficulty in poetry is, precisely, to construct a whole work with nothing but poetic elements and that "poésie pure" is exactly that and nothing else. He traces Valéry's use of the expression and amplifies how Valéry tried to approach his ideal through a system of rejections of narrative, description, and historical evocations. Pure poetry was, for Valéry, an attempt to purge poetry of foreign elements, prose elements.

While the concept of pure poetry is important to Valéry's theory of poetry, as Daniel Hughes points out in Coleridge and Valéry: An Essay in Modern Poetics, it is not to be taken as a formula which describes the whole significance and shape of Valéry's poetics.[114] That the term is associated with his name is primarily the result of historical accident and Abbé Bremond's misinterpretation of what Valéry meant. Abbé Bremond's pronouncements on the subject confused what was already a complex notion found in Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé as well as in Valéry's work.

A detailed account of the history of pure poetry, including an informative chapter on Valéry, is found in Pure Poetry, Studies in French Poetic Theory and Practice, 1746 to 1945 by D.J. Mossop.[115] Mossop also discusses Mallarmé's ideas on the subject. Valéry's theory reflects, in part, the influence of Mallarmé. Comprehensive

discussion is not necessary or pertinent here, but Mossop's distinction of pure poetry in Mallarmé as metaphysical purity and in Valéry as technical purity is a helpful one.

Mossop believes that the "Fragments" is very close to pure poetry since it conveys a serenely intense emotion with the help of the barest minimum of content (a fancied avowal of love to one's image reflected in a pool!), and through the agency of words which retain the initiative throughout.[116]

Although Valéry tended to exclude even description, Mossop, taking him at his word, analyzes the eight lines which Valéry specifically designated as his most pure, and makes a fairly strong case for their purity. He notes that in describing these lines as "vide d'idées," Valéry has given a somewhat rough and ready definition of his theory of pure poetry. The lines lack facts clearly related to the experience of life, facts which could explain for the reader an emotion communicated mysteriously and as if by virtue of words which have the opacity or emptiness of the sounds of music itself. Their lack of ready sense gives them something of the quality of musical sounds. He recognizes that the occasion of the emotion is Narcissus' attempted communion with his image in the pool, but that all reference to this desired union has been banished from the lines. The source of the emotion has been shifted to the decor, in this case the sunset. Consequently, he feels that the emotion has been purified by being

generalized, detached from the particular situation of a particular character. However, he realizes that raptures about a sunset carry their own danger, that of evoking emotion of a conventional, sentimental kind. Yet he contends that Valéry avoids the danger by increasing still further the indirectness of his treatment of the theme and the consequent degree of obscurity surrounding it. Valéry brings in another level of meaning, and this is the association of the sunset with a woman gradually losing the high coloration resulting from the act of love and falling asleep. According to Mossop, purity is achieved by the ambiguity and richness of meaning applied to the epithets, "brûlante," "lasse," "comblée" and "accablée" resulting from the combination of the three levels of meaning to which they simultaneously apply.[117]

The lines are pure in that they avoid any narrative movement. In fact, the beauty of the description, so lovingly rendered, is ironic. Narcissus does not welcome the sunset. The sunset heralds the approaching night, inimical to him. The lines, since they lack discursive quality, may be said to be empty of ideas not only because they never specifically mention the sunset, but also because they do not directly refer to the woman. They may have had their origin in Valéry's aphorism: "La fin du jour est femme" (O, I, 303).

Pure poetry is the lofty criterion by which Valéry judges the success of his own poetry. Only with

respect to the "Fragments" does he consider that he has come close to his ideal:

> Les huit vers que vous citez là... sont très précisément ceux qui m'ont côuté le plus de travail et que je considère comme les plus parfaits de tous ceux que j'ai écrits, je veux dire les plus conformes à ce que j'avais voulu qu'ils fussent, assouplis à toutes les contraintes que je leur avais assignées. Notez qu'ils sont, par ailleurs, absolument vides d'idées et atteignent ainsi à ce degré de pureté qui constitue justment ce que je nomme poésie pure.[118]

The sixteen lines immediately following the "O douceur..." sequence have been chosen for more detailed analysis since they have received little consideration so far. These lines further document the technical virtuosity evidenced by Valéry throughout the poem. The density of sound patterns, the attention to poetic conventions, and the calculated links to other parts of the poem should give some insight into the dimensions of the great poetic resources which Valéry brought to bear on this poem which is one of his most vital poetic "exercises."

To facilitate further discussion, I cite the lines in question.

> Quelle perte en soi-même offre un si calme lieu!
> L'âme, jusqu'à périr, s'y penche pour un Dieu
> Qu'elle demande à l'onde, onde déserte, et digne
> Sur son lustre, du lisse effacemnt d'un cygne...
> A cette onde jamais ne burent les troupeaux
> D'autres, ici perdus, trouveraient le repos,
> Et dans la sombre terre, un clair tombeau qui s'ouvre...

> Mais ce n'est pas le calme, hélas! que j'y découvre!
> Quand l'opaque délice où dort cette clarté
> Cède à mon corps l'horreur du feuillage écarté,
> Alors, vainqueur de l'ombre, ô mon corps tyrannique,
> Repoussant aux forêts leur épaisseur panique,
> Tu regrettes bientôt leur éternelle nuit!
> Pour l'inquiet Narcisse, il n'est ici qu'ennui!
> Tout m'appelle et m'enchaîne à la chair lumineuse
> Que m'oppose des eaux la paix vertigineuse!
> (O, I, 123-24).

Among the traditional rhetorical devices utilized by Valéry in this section are alliteration, oxymoron, epithets, antithesis, and pathetic fallacy. In addition, Valéry works through a complicated pattern of harmonic resonances. These echo patterns serve as important links in this section but are also part of an overall "echaînement" bringing unity to the first "fragment" and, in many ways, tying it to the other two fragments as well. The first word "Quelle" (l. 59) is echoed visually as well as aurally in qu'elle (l. 61) and reechoed in terms of end sound in "éternelle" (l. 71) and "m'appelle" (l. 73). "Perte," the second word rhymes with "déserte" in line sixty-one. This type of internal rhyme goes on and on, word after word, almost interminably. One of the loveliest examples comes at exactly the same syllable (the sixth) in three separate lines (ll. 62, 67, and 71) - "lisse," "délice" and "Narcisse."

"Perte" not only rhymes with "déserte," it must be associated with "perdus" (l. 64) which in turn is linked by contrast to the word immediately adjacent to it - "trouveraient" (l. 64).[119] Many of the antitheses

set up in this section are also found in other sections of the poem and are a part of the ever-present dichotomy of body and soul. This division is intensified and made more poignant by the repeated mention of numerous other opposites such as day and night, sound and silence, light and dark, etc. Effects similar to the clair/obscur development noted earlier in reference to "Narcisse parle" are found here in the "sombre/clair and "opaque"/"clarté" of lines like "Et dans la sombre terre, un clair tombeau qui s'ouvre..." and "Quand l'opaque délice où dort[120] cette clarté." The harmony is further enhanced by the sound repetition in "sombre" and "tombeau." "Sombre" is also reechoed several lines later in the "ombre" of line sixty-nine.

Another dramatic antithesis informs this whole section. The first line speaks of "un si calme lieu." Although the word "calme" is repeated (l. 66), the mood is anything but calm for the "inquiet Narcisse" (l. 71) who says: "Mais ce n'est pas le calme, hélas! que j'y découvre!" and this mood is reinforced by "horreur" "panique" (l. 70)[121] and "éternelle nuit" (l. 71). The word "calme" is repeated a number of times in the poem so that it becomes almost ironic,[122] but perhaps no word is repeated more frequently than "onde," three times in this section, ten times in all.[123] In this section "onde" is described in the epithet "onde déserte, et digne." "Digne" has an extended reference for in addition to

describing "onde," it also leads directly into the next line - "digne . . . du lisse effacement d'un cygne." The latter phrase has its own interesting history. It is another example of Valéry's penchant for changing an expression to mean just the opposite, providing two possible solutions for a poetic development. At one point the line read: "du lisse avènement d'un cygne."[124] "Effacement" is more fitting since it reinforces "périr" (l. 60)[125] and foreshadows the ultimate disappearance of Narcissus' image.

The stress on antithesis also marks the end of this sequence in Valéry's use of the oxymoron, "paix vertigineuse," admirably suited to the troubled tone projected by Narcissus which contrasts with his calm surroundings and evokes, too, what is to be found in the wavering, watery reflection - the peace of death.

Finally, I would like to mention one further conventional poetic device which Valéry uses to bring additional unity to the first "fragment." A network of interwoven metaphors and images serves to make the poem more poetic, while, at the same time, stressing the seriousness of Narcissus' dilemma. "Enchaîne" in the line "Tout m'appelle et m'enchaîne à la chair lumineuse" is part of this carefully woven tissue of images which might be called a slave/master metaphor which is directly related to the body and soul opposition, for the beauty of the body holds tyranny over the soul. The union of

the two is death, but the soul is irresistibly drawn, as though chained, to the "Dieu/ Qu'elle demande à l'onde..." Words like "vainqueur" and "tyrannique" (l. 69) are a part of this interrelated imagery which is most perfectly expressed in the metaphor: "Ma soif est un esclave nu" (l. 135),[126] but also projected by words like "proie" (l. 85), "captif" (ll. 86 and 119), and "obéissante" (l. 116). The motif may also be seen in a minor key in the use of many words related to escape and the impossibility of escape such as "enlacent," "extraire," "échappeé," "fuite," etc.

Similar studies of virtually any line sequence in the second or third fragment would yield corresponding results: the same attention to harmony, networks of intricate and effective imagery, thoughtful use of conventional poetic devices, etc. A different type of technical analysis is also revealing. Eva Gerstel examines the creative process in two early manuscripts of the "Fragments."[127] Consequently, her work is pertinent to this study. She correctly sees Valéry's manuscripts as a mirror of the poet's mind. She examines two early unpublished versions of the second "fragment," which are found in Harvard's Houghton Library. These manuscripts, undated, comprise lines twenty-five to eighty-two. Both of them present the episode of the vanity of human love already discussed earlier in this chapter. Placing the

lines side by side with the definitive version, she carefully follows the changes Valéry made. Her conclusions, though oversimplified as she admits, nevertheless, do shed light on Valéry's method and theory and reinforce a number of statements already made earlier in this study in connection with other parts of the poem. She contends that there are two large categories of changes: syntactical and sound patterns. Pertaining to syntax, two points in particular are relevant. She notes that the word order is modified to increase clarity and concrete language is substituted for abstract language.[128] As far as sound patterns are concerned, she notices an increase in alliteration, particularly the consonants: m, f, l, p, d, t, k, s. Overall, she concludes that Valéry's method in the composition of the "Fragments" consisted of: 1. Striving for harmonic structure through alliteration, variation of vowel timbres, and linking of groups of lines; 2. Choosing visual rather than intellectual images; and 3. Working from the rhyme inward, leaving the rhyme to set the tone and to give meaning to the lines.[129]

Jean Chaillet, in his article: "Paul Valéry: Le Finale de Narcisse," provides still another type of technical study of the "Fragments."[130] In an analysis of grammar and style concentrating on lines twenty-nine to fifty of the third fragment, Chaillet examines, first, five specific words or expressions: "sépares," "baiser,"

"ce peu que," "elle se fait immense," and "va...joindre." The two most interesting from the poetic standpoint are "sépares" and "baiser." Chaillet tries to explain grammatically the final "s" on "sépares" found in the line: "O mon corps, mon cher corps, temple qui me sépares." After reviewing some of the possible grammatical reasons which ordinarily would explain such an "s," he incorrectly concludes that "temple" is not in the second person. He goes on to suggest:

> Il faut pour expliquer le 's,' ou bien supposer un besoin de régularité très classique avec la rime précédente ("...lèvres avares"), ou bien y déceler une intention d'irrégularité pour accentuer l'appel lancé par le premier vers du développement. L'une et l'autre explication est possible chez Valéry.[131]

Given Valéry's insistence on putting the demands of poetry first, the explanation having to do with the requirements of rhyme is probably the most logical. The next word which Chaillet explains is "baiser" from the line: "Votre bouche... Et bientôt, je briserais, baiser." His explanation of the word is somewhat circuitous and not totally satisfactory. He begins:

> Le mot, poétiquement, est placé ici entre virgules; c'est comme "temple," une apposition. La phrase normale correspondante demanderait bien plutôt un complément de circonstance, à mi-chemin entre le lieu et la manière: "je briserais dans un baiser."[132]

This would be an ellipsis common to the poetry of both Mallarmé and Valéry. If Valéry is being elliptical, perhaps he merely meant "je briserais [pour] baiser," announcing, in effect, the ending where he exhorts himself to bend and kiss the image: "Penche-toi...Baise-toi. Tremble de tout ton être!"/ L'insaisissable amour que tu me vins promettre/ Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Naricsse, et fuit...." Chaillet is, of course, correct in noting that "baiser," set off as it is, is strongly accented. Concerning "baiser," he concludes:

> Paul Valéry use de la langue en poète, il dépasse les frontières de la syntaxe: son apposition fait image et, toute "placée à côte" qu'elle soit, elle prend une charge significante plus grande que les éléments attendus obligatoirement, pour constituer une unité de pensée: parenthèse sans doute, mais parenthèse essentielle.[133]

The next two sections of Chaillet's article, which discuss the verb tenses and the qualifiers used by Valéry, add little that is relevant to the present study, but part four entitled "La ponctuation et sa valeur d'expression" is important. Valéry is seldom arbitrary about punctuation. He often changes the punctuation, but usually does so purposely. Chaillet is especially interested in Valéry's use of suspension points.

> La vingtaine de lignes sur lesquelles se développe ce finale de Narcisse se signale d'abord par la présence de 8 séries de points de suspensions. Ces points ne sont jamais vides de signification.

> Parfois, ils montrent l'hésitation, l'arrêt d'un élan qui apparaît dangereusement sacrilège: c'est le cas du vers [Votre bouche ... Et bientôt, je briserais, baiser,] et du vers [Entre moi-même et l'onde, et mon âme, et les dieux! ...] semble-t-il; ils renforcent d'abord le rejet de "votre bouche" qui marque déjà une réticence. Ils amplifient ensuite la résonance de la fin du vers.[134]

In the final section in which he discusses rhythm, Chaillet reminds us of the significance of Valéry's choice of alexandrines for this poem. "Paul Valéry est un classique. Il s'est voulu et s'est proclamé classique. Le vers qu'il utilise, l'alexandrin, majestueux et noble, convient à la tragique aventure du héros mythologique Narcisse.... Sans jamais enfreindre les règles anciennes, Paul Valéry lui fait rendre les effets qui conviennent à sa pensée."[135] In fact, one of Chaillet's main contentions is that Valéry's classicism is nowhere more apparent than in the "Fragments."

Before leaving the third fragment, I would like to stress, once again, that although it is the most fragmentary in appearance, it is, nevertheless, given its limited size, as rich in concentrated poetic imagery and as accomplished in technical virtuosity as the rest of the poem. If one were to isolate any group of lines from this section, this would be easily demonstrated. Even a brief glance is rewarding. There is a similar richness of figurative language in lines like: "L'arbre

aveugle vers l'arbre étend ses membres sombres" which relates back to "l'arbre pleure" of the first fragment. There is the same regard for alliteration: "Pure, et toute pareille au plus pur de l'esprit" and "Votre bouche ... Et bientôt, je briserais, baiser" to give just two examples from many. The play of opposites, so evident in the other fragments, continues here, and there is the same stress on internal rhyme and repetition of words, even similar phrases or groups of words are found like "L'âme, l'âme aux yeux noirs touche aux ténèbres mêmes" (l. 42) which is reminiscent of the line in the first fragment: "Les yeux mêmes et noirs de leur âme étonnée!" (l. 75).[136]

The preceding discussion may be viewed as an introduction to Valéry's theory of "enchaînement," an important aspect of his theory of poetry. Valéry's predilection for links is discussed by Hytier in La Poétique de Valéry (Chapter 6: "La Composition"). These links are in terms of words with words, metaphor with metaphor, line with line, movement with rhythm. It is their complexity which gives continuity and form to the poem.

Summary

Detailed analysis of the "Fragments du Narcisse" has led to discussion of Valéry's theory of pure poetry, his theory of "enchaînement" (which he also referred to as "la loi de liaison"), his evolution away from the

Symbolism of the 1890's, his classicism, and his enthusiastic and serious utilization of the rules of the game of poetry.

Each of the five subdivisions in this chapter has at least one point in common, they all contain examples of Valéry's determination to use to the fullest the poetic tools of his trade in order to arrive at a purer poetic product.

While the introduction and study of background showed that the "Fragments" was a complex poem taken seriously by most readers, it also introduced the idea that for Valéry, poetry was a challenging, never finished, exercise to be played by established rules and conventions for maximum results. Comparison with "Narcisse parle" revealed Valéry's method of revision, retention, and regrouping. The revisions demonstrate the increased attention to refining the epithets and the alliteration and to adding numerous other devices like anaphora, oxymoron, simile, and antithesis.

While it helped to clarify Valéry's overall lack of direct, traceable debt to other writers with the possible exception of Racine, the section on comparison and contrast with other poets also emphasized once again the fact that it is not the subject of the poem which is important to Valéry, but the poetic treatment which counts most. Also with respect to the question of influence it should

be noted that the theories of Poe have lost ground. In particular, Poe's short poem theory has been abandoned. Two out of three of the "Fragments" are over one hundred lines.

Valéry's use of Ovid was selective and creative so that despite the increased use of some of the traditional aspects of Ovid's tale, Valéry's poem remains strikingly original. Although he does not create a new myth, he revitalizes the old one through the beauty of his verse and the originality of his approach, which rejects the usual narrative and didactic uses of the myth and concentrates on the production of what is poetic for its own sake.

"Fragments du Narcisse" is a much more serious poem than "Narcisse parle." It depicts a complex internal drama. The aim is not merely beauty as with "Narcisse parle" but truth, the truth about the self and its potential to reach the absolute of total consciousness. As far as Valéry is concerned, however, this level of the poem is of secondary importance. The true import of the "Fragments du Narcisse" is in its poetry. Always determined to participate as consciously as possible in any act undertaken, Valéry is a dedicated spectator at the drama of the way poetry unfolds. Always intrigued before the mirror of the mind, Valéry is equally fascinated by reflection on artistic creation. Utilizing to the fullest the conventions and constraints of poetry, the poem is

developed as a conscious, calculated intellectual exercise, a means of engaging as much of the mind's power as possible.

Just as "Narcisse parle" was closest to the ideal of his youthful poetry, the "Fragments du Narcisse" with its eight lines of pure poetry is seen by Valéry as closest to the ideal of his mature period. The Cantate du Narcisse, which will be analyzed next, presents a very different aspect of Valéry's poetic career. While it has received neither the acclaim nor the attention accorded the other two poems, it is, nonetheless, a revealing work, typical of the final period in Valéry's poetic history which seeks to combine drama, music, and poetry.

NOTES

[1]All three parts of the poem in its final form appear in O, I, 122-130.

[2]Albert Thibaudet, Paul Valéry (Paris: Grasset, 1923), pp. 127-28.

[3]Thibaudet, p. 96.

[4]Additional, somewhat earlier, information about Valéry's interest in the subject of rhetorical devices for poetry is afforded by Jean Hytier in La Poétique de Valéry, p. 10 - "Une lettre à Pierre Louÿs, peu après La Jeune Parque, qui abonde pourtant en tropes, montre Valéry encore fort peu au fait des définitions des figures et demandant 'le livre à consulter sur l'ancienne théorie de la rhétorique.'"

[5]In the 1922 edition of Charmes, "Fragment du Narcisse" appeared as twelfth out of twenty-two poems preceding "Ode secrète" and following "L'Intérieur."

[6]Revue Universelle, tome V., no. 3, (1921), 277-79 contains a fragment entitled Narcisse (Fragments), consisting of line 1 to 28, 40 to 63, 69 to 71 and 76 to 84 with few variants, see O, I, 1665-66. La Nouvelle Revue Française, 93 (1921), 760-762, contains essentially the same version.

[7]La Pléiade (1921), 226-29, in many ways similar to the version published in the Revue de Paris. For additional details see O, I, 1666.

[8]See Le Divan, 79 (1922), 199 for first sixteen lines. In NRF, 117 (1923), 853-56 under the title Etudes pour Narcisse, except for a few punctuation variants, this version is definitive consisting of 116 lines. Lines 22 to 48 were published separately in L'Anthologie des poètes du Divan in 1923, p. 135 and all 116 lines appeared under the title Etudes pour Narcisse in l'Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie française (Editions du Sagittaire: Simon Kra, 1924). Further publication details and variants in O, I, 1668-1670.

[9]In NRF 104 (1922), 513-15 under the title Fragments du Narcisse. For variants, which are only minor, see O, I, 1671.

[10]The Stols edition was a limited edition printed at Maestricht by A.A.M. Stols in April 1926.

[11]An incidental but interesting part of the publication history of the "Fragments du Narcisse" is that a Japanese translation was published as early as 1924 in Recueil de poèmes français modernes, choix et traduction en japonais par Shintaro Suzuki (Tokio: Shunyod, 1924), pp. 323-36.

[12]See La Poésie de Valéry, especially pp. 271-273.

[13]Also appears in Paul Valéry vivant, p. 290.

[14]Wallace Fowlie, "Valéry's Dream of Narcissus" in Climate of Violence, The French Literary Tradition from Baudelaire to the Present (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 71-86.

[15]Fowlie, p. 77.

[16]Mentioned also as early as 1912 in a letter to Albert Thibaudet, "Par conséquence, j'ai cessé de faire des vers. Cet art devenu impossible à moi de 1892, je le tenais déjà pour un exercise, ou application de recherches plus importantes. Pourquoi ne pas développer en soi, cela seul qui dans la genèse du poème m'intéresse?" from Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 97. (Second emphasis mine.)

[17]"Propos me concernant," p. 49.

[18]Valéry's report of a conversation he had with the German poet, Rainer-Maria Rilke published in the Suisse contemporaine in September 1945 and also quoted in part in Vues (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), p. 196. Related to the concept of the process of poetic creation as an exercise is Valéry's use of the familiar love theme in the second fragment. As Fowlie points out, Valéry was keenly aware of how banal and overworked the theme had been, especially in Romantic poetry, but he looked upon it as an exercise and a challenge.

[19]O, I, 1485, from "Fragments des mémoirs d'un poème" first published in the Revue de Paris, December 15, 1937.

[20]Fowlie, p. 73.

[21]From "Calepin d'un poète" first published in Poésie, Essai sur la Poétique et la Poète, Collection Bertrand Guégan, in August 1928.

[22]Valéry himself comments on the relative unimportance of subject when he says: "Pour qui s'intéresse de très près au travail même du vers, il importe peut-être assez peu de varier les sujets. Je concevrais fort bien qu'un poète amoureux de son art se contentât de refaire, sa vie durant, toujours le même poème, en donnant tous les trois, quatre ou cinq ans, une variation nouvelle d'un thème une fois choisi." Frédéric Lefèvre, Entretiens avec Paul Valéry (Paris: Le Livre, 1926), p. 68. Obviously, Valéry's use and reuse of the Narcissus myth in one form or another is the theory put into practice.

[23]Fowlie, p. 74.

[24]Valéry felt that the poem, the poet, and the poet's life were three separate and unrelated entities. Once the poem was "finished" it was the reader's property. The workings of the artist's mind might be reflected in his poem, but his personal life had no place there.

[25]Fowlie, p. 73.

[26]Fowlie, p. 74.

[27]Fowlie, p. 78.

[28]Fowlie, p. 76-77.

[29]This is another part of Valéry's report of his conversation with Rilke already referred to in note 18.

[30]James R. Lawler, Lecture de Valéry, Une Etude de Charmes (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

[31]Lawler, p. 95.

[32]Lawler, p. 108-09.

[33]Lawler's analysis was published first.

[34]Lawler, p. 114.

[35]Fowlie, p. 85-86.

[36]For example, Cahiers 8, p. 449, "Narcisse comme un fou courait à sa fontaine/ Au risque de périr tant il pensait à soi," and p. 450, "Narcisse. Chez lui l'esprit, le coeur, la chair sont liés plus que chez tout autre. - Et ceci se voit par les expressions qu'il emploie, qu'il invente, qu'il combine." See Lawler, p. 96-98.

[37]Lawler, p. 97. Quote of Valéry from Lettres à André Fontainas, Réponses (1928), p. 16.

[38]Lawler, pp. 97-98. Quoted from Tel Quel, O, II. 547.

[39]Lawler, p. 101.

[40]Lawler, p. 101-02, from "Rencontres avec Paul Valéry," Le Figaro Littéraire, 19 juillet 1952.

[41]Lawler, p. 102.

[42]Lawler, p. 102.

[43]Lawler, p. 102.

[44]Lawler, p. 102.

[45]Gerstel's study appears in Symposium, 23 (1969), 16-37. Less detailed but still useful are: Jean Chaillet, "Paul Valéry: Le finale de Narcisse" in Etudes de grammaire et de style, v. 2 (Paris: Bordas, 1969), pp. 288-301; and Roland Derche, Quatre Mythes poétiques (OEdipe-Narcisse-Psyché-Lorelei), (Paris: Société d'Edition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1961), pp. 98-106.

[46]Walzer, p. 282.

[47]Walzer, p. 283.

[48]Walzer recording the line sequence errs here (p. 271). It should read 66-67 and 109-114 not 66-68 and 110-114.

[49]Walzer, p. 271.

[50]Walzer, p. 275.

[51]For these minor variants see O, I, 1664-65.

[52]Valéry felt that the true poet always put form above content. "S'il est un vrai poète, il sacrifiera presque toujours à la forme (qui, après tout, est la fin et l'acte même, avec ses nécessités organiques) cette pensée qui ne peut se fondre en poème si elle exige pour s'exprimer qu'on use de mots ou de tours étrangers au ton poétique" (O, I, p. 455). More specifically of himself, ". . .je subordonne (d'autant plus que je suis plus proche de mon meilleur état) le contenu à la forme - toujours disposé à sacrifier cela à ceci" in "Propos me concernant," p. 20. An on rhyme in particular: "il y a

bien plus de chances pour qu'une rime procure une'idée' (littéraire) que pour trouver la rime à partir de l'idée" (O, II, 582).

[53]For this same line in the final version, Valéry, properly it seems to me, reverts to the earlier form, and the line now reads as it did in "Narcisse parle." Thereby, Valéry makes the following important corrections. "La" and "nu" are both placed in accented positions. "Là," d'un reste du jour se forme un fiancé,/ Nu sur la place pâle où m'attire l'eau triste" and, consequently, more appropriately strengthen and enhance the necessary concentration on "fiancé" as they should rather than ambiguously and less felicitously modifying "lueur" as they did in early versions of the "Fragments." "Là, nue entre les bras qui naissent des forêts,/ Une tendre lueur . . . ."

[54]Walzer, p. 273.

[55]"Fig. Partie dissimulée, secrète." Dictionnaire alphabétique & analogique de la langue fraçaise, Paul Robert (Paris: Société du nouveau Littré, 1967), p. 1523.

[56]For example, lines 72 and 88. "Que je déplore ton éclat fatal et pur" and "Son gracieux éclat vous retienne pensif."

[57]Lawler, p. 109.

[58]Lawler, p. 109

[59]Derche, p. 102.

[60]Pierre Michel, Valéry, II. L'Ecrivain Classique (Paris: Les Editions Foucher, n.d.), p. 17.

[61]Gerstel, p. 27.

[62]Fowlie, p. 83.

[63]Robert Monestier, Paul Valéry: "Charmes" (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1951), p. 64.

[64]Alain (Emile Chartier), Charmes, poèmes de Paul Valéry commentés par Alain (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p. 90.

[65]MacKay, p. 135. Valéry discusses this event in "Le Prince et La Jeune Parque," O, I, pp. 1492-1496.

[66]MacKay, p. 135. The letter referred to appears in Réponses: Lettres de 1917-1928 (Saint-Felicien-en Vivarais: Le Pigeonnier, 1928), p. 18 but text is unavailable.

[67]Evelyne Suhami, Paul Valéry et la musique (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1966), pp. 100-01.

[68]Walzer, p. 278.

[69]"Sur Phèdre femme," Variété IV, 1944, O, I, 508.

[70]Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, Etudes de "Charmes" de Paul Valéry (Bruxelles: L'Ecran du Monde, 1947), p. 71.

[71]Priscilla Washburn Shaw, Rilke, Valéry and Yeats, the Domain of the Self (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1964), p. 152.

[72]In addition to "Sur Phèdre femme," see for example Valéry's essay "Le Prince et la Jeune Parque: (O, I, 1491-96), Valéry's acceptance speech at the Académie Française, especially O, I, 738, and the note in the Cahiers of June 1927, "Comme j'ai fait la J.P." It seems clear that Valéry saw in Racine his own dedication to purity in poetry. One example attesting to this fact is a comment reported by Gide in his Journal of 1928, Pléiade ed., p. 891: "Parbleu! Dostoievsky aussi cède à des raisons d'art (tout comme Valéry prétend que faisait Racine, qui, disait-il, aurait changé le caractère de Phèdre plutôt que de faire un mauvais vers). . ."

[73]Not relevant to this approach: Henri Bremond, Racine et Valéry, Notes sur l'initiation poétique (Paris: Grasset, 1930).

[74]Décaudin, p. 54.

[75]Alain, p. 74.

[76]Alain, p. 74.

[77]Alain, p. 94. (See also p. 92 where Alain cites Lucretius, noting that Valéry and Lucretius understand love in much the same way.)

[78]Pierre Michel, "Paul Valéry et le thème de Narcisse," L'Ecole, 24 Nov. 1951, p. 158. "Avec l'extrême pudeur d'un homme sain, Alain rappelle que dans presques tous ses poèmes, Valéry associe une sensualité brûlante à une pensée austère, ce qui lui fait répéter sans cesse: 'Valéry est notre Lucrèce.'"

[79]Valéry, II. - L'Ecrivain Classique, p. 16.

[80]From the essay "Poésie et pensée abstraite," O, I, 1335-36.

[81]O, I, 1336. Valéry alludes here to an important and frequent analogy he has made comparing poetry to dance and prose to walking.

[82]"Mais notre poésie, depuis cent ans, a montré de si riches ressources, et une puissance si rare de renouvellement, que l'avenir lui donnera peut-être assez vite quelques-unes de ces oeuvres de grand style et d'une noble sévérité, qui dominent le sensible et l'intelligible" (O, I, 856).

[83]"Et il lui arrive alors de prétendre qu'il n'y a pas de matière poétique au monde qui soit plus riche que celle-ci; que la vie de l'intelligence constitue un univers lyrique incomparable, un drama complet, où ne manquent ni l'aventure, ni les passions, ni la douleur (qui s'y trouve d'une essence toute particulière), ni le comique, ni rien d'humain" (O, I, 796).

[84]Derche, p. 102.

[85]Walzer, p. 281.

[86]Walzer, p. 281.

[87]"'L'amour dans sa fureur (dit-il, à peu près), est chose si laide que la race humaine s'éteindrait, - la natura si perderebbe, - si ceux qui le font se voyaient.' Ce mépris est accusé par divers croquis, car le comble du mépris pour certaines choses est enfin de les examiner à loisir. Il dessine donc çà et là des union anatomiques, coupes effroyables à même l'amour. La machine érotique l'intéresse, la mécanique animale étant son domaine le préféré; mais un combat de sueurs et l'essoufflement des opranti, un monstre de musculatures antagonistes, une transfiguration en bêtes - cela semble n'exciter en lui que répugnance et que dedáin..." (O, I, 1212).

[88]O, I, 1212.

[89]O, I, 1212-13.

[90]Also aware of Valéry's possible debt to Leonardo on the subject of physical love as that of the "monstre de musculatures antagonistes" is Walzer, pp. 279-80.

[91]Gerstel, p. 22.

[92]For instance, Valéry greatly admired LaFontaine's "Adonis," especially certain lines on love. See "Au Sujet d'Adonis" (O, I, 474-485).

[93]See also, Geoffrey H. Hartman, The Unmediated Vision, an Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1966).

[94]Later, in a monograph, the writer hopes to resolve the still unsettled Valéry/Racine problem.

[95]Jean Soulairol, Paul Valéry (Paris: Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1952), p. 147.

[96]Soulairol, p. 148.

[97]Soulairol, p. 148.

[98]But Valéry eventually uses a somewhat similar anaphoric negative sequence at the very end of the first "fragment:" "Que nulle vierge enfant échappée au satyre,/ Nulle aux fuites habiles, aux chutes sans émoi,/ Nulle des nymphes, nulle amie, ne m'attire...."

[99]Soulairol, p. 148.

[100]Soulairol, p. 148.

[101]In Valéry's poems, especially in the poems about poetic creation in Charmes, it is possible to demonstrate that water, a major symbol for Valéry, possibly his most important, represents consistently aspects of the mind, particularly the conscious mind. For details, see Dorothy H. Schnare, Water Symbolism in Valéry's "Charmes" (University of Florida: M.A. thesis, 1972).

[102]Easily demonstrated since it is, of course, well known that Valéry was married, raised a family, gave numerous public lectures throughout Europe, was elected to the French Academy, allowed his poems and lectures to be published, was considered official poet of France, etc. Yet, the monumental Cahiers set him apart despite the outward, worldly picture.

[103]Suhami, p. 98.

[104]Suhami, p. 99.

[105]Suhami, p. 99.

[106]It does not appear at all in the first versions of the "Fragments."

[107]O, I, 1667.

[108]This probably accounts for Valéry's line: "Antres, qui me rendez mon âme plus profonde," (l. 100), part of the echo scene (ll. 93-109).

[109]The writer is grateful to Dr. Raymond Gay-Crosier for these ideas about Echo.

[110]The Narcissus figure in the Middle Ages was used, for example, as a warning example to those who would not submit to the power of love, as a reminder of the vainness of pride and ambition, as a moral to illustrate the danger of worldly pleasures through the loss of life after death. For a summary of the use of the Narcissus theme in the Middle Ages, see Vinge, especially p. 76, 90, and 114.

[111]See especially Fowlie, p. 79 and Lawler, p. 103. Lawler begins: "Le soliloque s'ouvre sur une exclamation dont le caractère est ambigu: est-ce l'expression du contentement du protagoniste maintenant qu'il a en vue l'aboutissement de ses efforts: ou bien plutôt son désir de voir ce but chatoyer enfin devant lui?"

[112]According to Léon Clédat, Dictionnaire Etymologique de la langue française (Paris: Hachette, 1913), p. 63, "brilles" is etymologically related to "béryl - émeraude transparente." This may have suggested the use of "émeraudes" in the third fragment when Narcissus prays for continued light - "Dites qu'une lueur de rose ou d'émeraudes."

[113]Fowlie, p. 79.

[114]Daniel John Hughes, Coleridge and Valéry: An Essay in Modern Poetics (Dissertation: Brown University, 1958), p. 134.

[115]D.J. Mossop, Pure Poetry, Studies in French Poetic Theory and Practice 1746 to 1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[116]Mossop, p. 221.

[117]Mossop, p. 222-23.

[118]Quoted in Jean de Latour, Examen de Valéry, p. 159, and in O, I, 1672.

[119]Same type of development in the second "fragment" l. 56 - "Ils vont des biens perdus trouver tous les tombeaux...."

[120]This line because of the use of "dort" re-evokes the "univers dormant" (l. 11).

[121]"Panique" undoubtedly also has the meaning "qui vient du dieu Pan," Clédat, 470, given Valéry's tendency to use archaic meanings.

[122]Found earlier in lines 24 and 36.

[123]As indicated by Monique Parent, Cohérence et résonance dans le style de "Charmes" de Paul Valéry (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970), p. 22.

[124]The Pléiade edition of 1921.

[125]"Périr" is part of the alliteration of the line - "L'ame jusqu'à périr, s'y penche pour un Dieu."

[126]Repeated three lines later "cher esclave."

[127]Gerstel, pp. 16-37.

[128]This is consistent with Valéry's intention to make the "Fragments" the counterpart of La Jeune Parque, simple in its form and giving practically no difficulty with comprehension (O, I, 1672).

[129]Gerstel, pp. 35-36.

[130]Chaillet, pp. 288-301.

[131]Chaillet, p. 289.

[132]Chaillet, p. 289.

[133]Chaillet, p. 290.

[134]Chaillet, p. 297.

[135]Chaillet, p. 298-99.

[136]Further study of the third fragment will be made in a monograph devoted to a detailed analysis of it in terms of both technique and meaning.

CHAPTER III

CANTATE DU NARCISSE

Valéry's Cantate du Narcisse[1] brings us to a different art form: theater. Yet poetry and Valéry's theory of poetry remain in the foreground since the Cantate is the most poetic of Valéry's compositions for the theater. As Ailene Arensbach indicates in The Theater of Paul Valéry: "this work more than any other work of Valéry's for the stage can rightfully be called a poetic drama."[2]

To demonstrate what the Cantate du Narcisse reveals about Valéry's theory of poetry, the same pattern of analysis used for the earlier chapters will be followed. A general introduction with background details will come first. This, of necessity, will include a brief look at the role of theater in Valéry's work. Discussion of Valéry's theater leads logically into the question of influence. Gluck and Racine come to mind immediately. References have also been made to Corneille and Wagner. Further speculation on the problem of influence and possible sources makes it possible to show that Valéry, in this work, has reverted to conventional Symbolism, often quite subtly, by adopting elements and techniques found

in Symbolist theater. Next, an examination of the unique use which Valéry continues to make of Ovid's Metamorphoses points out how he was able to increase both the poetic and the dramatic qualities of the Cantate making it, in many ways, his most original Narcissus poem. This chapter, unlike the others, does not include a survey of critical commentary on the work in question. References will be incorporated into the discussion of the other aspects outlined above. Studies of this work are sparse in any case, on occasion unduly negative, and often stereotyped. Most commentary involves at the most a page or two. Arensbach's exegesis of the work is an exception consisting of more than ten carefully considered pages of examination and explanation (pp. 91-101). Finally, an analysis of several aspects of the libretto itself will be made. This section will also include comparison with the earlier works on Narcissus in order to see what additional conclusions can be drawn about Valéry's poetics in the final chapter of his "autobiographie poétique."

For a little over ten years, from about 1914 to 1926, Valéry's poetry was his most important creative activity. Beginning in 1914 with his work on La Jeune Parque and ending with the 1926 edition of Charmes which contained, for the first time, all three of the "Fragments," Valéry was at the peak of his poetic career. Around 1929, or perhaps a little before, and for approximately the next fifteen years, until his death in 1945,

Valéry's major creative work was in the area of theater. Poetry was not abandoned. Deluxe editions of his poems appeared frequently and the new poems, now often prose poems, were published sporadically. However, works created for the stage dominated this final period of his life. Although Valéry had written a number of dialogues which could be staged and were presented with some success,[3] Amphion, written in 1929, was his first production definitely intended to be performed on the stage. This was followed by Sémiramis, published in 1934, and the Cantate du Narcisse, published in 1939. The final and probably the most ambitious theatrical attempt was the never finished Mon Faust (ébauches). There is certainly poetry in all of these works: Amphion and Sémiramis are written in free verse and Mon Faust, particularly the last part of Le Solitaire, "Intermède," has some scintillating poetic dialogue. The Cantate, however, is Valéry's only dramatic work written entirely in rhymed verse, much of it in polished alexandrines.

Of Valéry's three works on Narcissus, the least amount of background information is available for the Cantate. Unlike the pages and pages of notes devoted to "Narcisse parle" and the "Fragments du Narcisse," the Pléiade edition of Valéry's works contains only the following paragraph:

> Paru hors commerce, pour l'auteur et ses amis, en 1939, puis, sous le titre la Cantate du Narcisse,

> en tête du n^{o} 323 de la Nouvelle Revue Française, I^{er} janvier 1941, pp. 129 à 148. Repris, sous le titre Cantate du Narcisse, dans Mélange (1941) et dans l'édition de 1942 des Poésies; édition séparée chez Gallimard en 1943. Voir l'album la Cantate du Narcisse, 20 images photographiques de Laure Albin-Gruillot, Impr. Arta, 1942 (O, I, 1720).

The lack of readily available information on this work is apparent in Evelyne Suhami's Paul Valéry et la musique. She comments as follows:

> Le Narcisse quelque peu remanié pour le théâtre, a trouvé son monde musical. En effet, c'est à la demande de M^{me} Germaine Tailleferre, auteur de nombreuses musiques de scène, élève de Ravel, que Valéry écrivit la Cantate du Narcisse en novembre 1938. L'oeuvre est donnée en janvier 1944 au Conservatoire à Paris, et à la fin de la même année au studio des Champs-Elysées. Aucun document ne nous permet de parler plus longuement de la musique et de l'interprétation de cette Cantate. L'on peut simplement remarquer à nouveau que le poète a choisi un véritable leit-motif de sa Pensée pour sa dernière oeuvre lyrique.[4]

Agathe Rouart-Valéry's "Introduction Biographique" which opens the Pléiade edition of Valéry's works lists the two performances mentioned by Suhami, but refers, in addition, to a reading of the work in 1939: "23 février: Lecture de la Cantate du Narcisse à la Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique dont Paul Valéry est le président d'honneur" (O, I, 64). On the preceding page the following comment occurs for August 1938:

"Pendant ses vacances à la Polynésie, Valéry écrit la Cantate du Narcisse, destinée à être mise en musique par Germaine Taillefer" (sic) (O, I, 63).

By piecing together other fragments of information, a little more can be learned about the background, genesis, and production of this work. From an article written by Stanislas Fumet for Arts, it is clear that in 1949, there was a successful radio broadcast of the work directed by Roger Desormière with Genette Guillamat and Jean Planel in the leading roles.[5]

Although Valéry does not mention the Cantate at all in "Sur les 'Narcisses,'" he did add an informative Avis to the work itself:

> Ce petit ouvrage est tout distinct et tout différent du Narcisse en deux états que son auteur a publiés jadis et naguère.
>
> Il fut écrit, d'avril à novembre 1938, sur la demande de Mme Germaine Tailleferre pour servir de libretto à une cantate qui a été composée par cette éminente musicienne.
>
> Toutefois, le présent texte est, en quelque endroit, un peu plus développé que le texte mis en musique (O, I, 403).

The third paragraph did not appear until after the 1941 publication. This Avis will be referred to again later. Another Avis written by Valéry reminds us that he included the Cantate, as the last work, in a diverse collection to which he gave the title: Mélange. By this title,

he meant, of course, a mixture or miscellany. He says in the "Avis au Lecteur:"

> Il n'est pas de livre dont le titre soit plus vrai que celui-ci. Le désordre qui "règne" (comme on dit) dans Mélange s'etend à la chronologie. Telle chose a été écrite il y a près de cinquante ans. Telle autre est d'avant-hier: entre le bref poème "Sinistre" et la Cantate du Narcisse, presque un demi-siècle s'est écoulé (O, I, 285).

He also meant something more by the title and the short poem which opens Mélange helps to explain its significance: "Mélange c'est l'esprit." Including the work in this collection indicates that the Cantate was not to be considered as lightweight musical entertainment, but that it is, instead, a significant part of the serious exercise of the mind afforded Valéry by creative activity from which he learned still more about the workings of the mind and the creative act itself. For Valéry a work taken up again and again and recast was a learning experience, a serious exercise in self-reform: "[. . .] une oeuvre toujours ressaisie et refondue [prend] peu à peu l'importance secrète d'une entreprise de réforme de soi-même" (O, I, 1496-97).

Valéry's foreword to the Cantate suggests that he composed the work at the request of the musician, Germaine Tailleferre, but her amusing account of the genesis of the work, complete with a gypsy fortuneteller predicting the details of its inception, disputes Valéry

on this point.[6] Valéry often maintained that his published works were ouvrages de commande. Yet the background to his dramatic compositions lends credence to Tailleferre's account which insists that he asked her. Valéry, it seems, had problems obtaining musicians to collaborate with him on his projects for the theater. The story of how he tried for years to get Debussy to work with him on a ballet about Orpheus is well known. In a letter to Debussy, Valéry even wrote a kind of prose poem outlining the project and requesting his collaboration.[7] Although this letter, in the form of a poem, was written in 1900, it was not until 1929 that Valéry was able to induce Honegger instead to collaborate with him. Together, the two created Amphion.[8]

Germaine Tailleferre, like Honegger, was a member of a group of composers known as "les Six."[9] Her music tended to be classical, simple, and lyrical. Consequently, she was a logical choice to work with Valéry. Her account of how their collaboration began indicates that she had been commissioned by the Director of Arts and Letters to compose a work - "lyrique, genre cantate de préférence" - for a considerable fee.[10] When Valéry heard this, he immediately offered his latest work on Narcissus, promising the first scene the very next day and mentioning that he was pressed for money:

> Votre collaborateur ce sera moi.
> J'ai toujours désiré écrire un

> nouveau Narcisse qui fût mis en musique sous la forme d'un cantate alla Gluck; et comme j'ai grand besoin d'argent, nous partagerons ce cachet, qui me libérera momentanément de quelques graves soucis.[11]

Insight into how the work was composed is an additional feature of Germaine Tailleferre's reminiscence:

> Notre première séance de travail eut lieu le lendemain après le déjeuner; elle se passa en promenades dans les oliveraies. Il me conta Narcisse. Ensuite, à chacun de ses passages dans le Midi, il m'apportait une nouvelle scène.[12]

Becoming more specific as to method and to what Valéry expected her music to do, she adds:

> ...Comme Claudel, il savait exactement ce qu'il voulait et quand un passage ne lui plaisait pas, il n'y avait qu'à le recommencer, ce que je fis pour la troisième scène que j'ai réécrite trois fois. Après la troisième version, je n'y voyais plus clair. C'est alors qu'il m'avoua que lui-même l'avait plusieurs fois réécrite, qu'il l'avait ratée. Pour ma part, j'avais raté la cinquième qui n'était pas du tout dans l'esprit qu'il voulait. Afin de me faciliter la tâche, il se proposa de me la lire pour que je note au fur et à mesure le rythme de sa diction. Avec ce mode de travail, j'obtenais, une prosodie parfaite. Instantanément, j'ai écrit avant lui la musique; mon annotation était la reproduction exacte du rythme de sa lecture. Il en était enchanté; moi aussi j'étais ravie d'avoir triomphé d'un obstacle et surtout de lui faire plaisir.[13]

From this passage, it is clear, once again, that Valéry, taking this work as seriously as his early poems about

Narcissus, reworked and revised in characteristic fashion. Also, it is obvious that the music was to serve the poetry. To understand the importance of this concept as well as the significance of the cantata form, and to clarify Valéry's overall dramatic aims, it is necessary to have some idea of his dramatic theories.

Valéry's interest in drama began early. In 1887, when he was only fifteen years old, he wrote two plays: Le Rêve de Morgan and Les Esclaves. At an early stage, he planned but never actually wrote a tragedy on the Emperor Tiberius which was to be called Tibère ou la Raison couronnée. His major poems, especially La Jeune Parque, are notable for their dramatic qualities, but Valéry seems to have written less about drama than any other art. There are, it is true, a number of references to theater in the Cahiers, important comments in letters, but in addition to "Histoire d'Amphion," a lecture read at a concert performance of Amphion in 1932,[14] there are only three major essays on theater: "Le Théâtre enchanté" (1932), "Mes Théâtres" (1942) and "Notes sur un tragique et un tragédie" (1946).

Valéry's reluctance to write formal essays on the subject of theater, may be due to the fact that he felt inadquate to discuss the genre:

> Devant le moindre spectacle, je me sens le plus incapable des hommes à concevoir comment cela est fait. Comment l'on assemble, comment on mène, comment on fait

> entrer, sortir, se mouvoir des personnages, comment l'on forme les noeuds que l'on dénouera, je l'ignore. Je puis bien écrire pour plusieurs voix, m'y étant essayé; mais l'action, les situations, les combinaisons et les résolutions me semblent exiger des dons miraculeux qui ne me laissent pas de me faire envie.[15]

Valéry shows, however, a clear grasp of what is involved in constructing what he calls "la machine dramatique," as Arensbach suggests.[16]

His three essays deal primarily with theater as architecture, theater as spectacle, and examine the role of the spectator. Arensbach's study, which is an informed and informative examination of Valéry's theater, describes and explains, carefully and thoughtfully, the details of Valéry's three main essays on theater.

For the study of the Cantate and Valéry's poetics, only certain points from these essays are pertinent. Realizing the risks involved in versifying for the theater, Valéry felt that recreating theater would reestablish poetry as a dramatic vehicle. He personally imagines two kinds of theater which he describes in "Mes Théâtres." One he calls "Guignol;" the other, "Temple." Arensbach succinctly describes them, stating first that by "Guignol" Valéry meant ordinary theater:

> All the elements of this theater will be as theatrical as possible. "tout s'y sent en carton, en plâtre déguisé, en or fictif." There will be a complete physical separation between the salle and the stage. Ordinary wood, fragile

> and painted, will be the major building material. The "Temple," on the other hand, will be constructed of a noble material and salle and stage will form an architectural unity. Each type of theatre will present a different type of spectacle. On the stage of the "Guignol" "la vie éclaterait et exercerait le pouvoir de gagner, le spectateur par contagion de l'extrême vivacité des actes, des surprises du dialogue, de l'étincellement des répliques." In the "Temple," the spectacle would be as rigidly fixed as possible, much like the liturgy of the Mass.[17]

Valéry's dialogues are closest to his concept of "Guignol." In the category of "Temple," Valéry places his "mélodrames," Amphion and Sémiramis. "Mon Faust" is a mixture of the two. Despite Francis Scarfe's misinterpretation of the fourth scene as "low level burlesque,"[18] the Cantate can only rightly be seen as "Temple."

Valéry does not seem to have written anything specific about his dramatic intentions with respect to the Cantate, nor about the effect which it was meant to have when staged. In fact, he has written almost nothing about how it should be staged. There are few stage directions and only the briefest description of the setting: "La scène représente une clairière. Au milieu, la fontaine" (O, I, 403). I shall discuss later possible reasons for these lacunae.

Bearing in mind Valéry's concept of theater as "Temple," it is reasonable to conceive of the Cantate, given its form and composition, as a liturgical drama in

the manner of Amphion even though it lacks obvious elements like the temple in Amphion and the altar in Sémiramis. First, there is the cantata form, often used for religious purposes. Here it is secular because of the content of the drama, but it has religious or at least quasi-religious overtones. The return of Narcissus to the fountain each evening is a ritual. The first Nymph says: "Il revient chaque soir se plaindre et se chérir" (Scene I, p. 405). Narcissus himself, addressing the Sun and comparing himself to it says: "Admire dans Narcisse un éternel retour/ Vers l'onde où son image offerte à son amour/ Propose à sa beauté toute sa connaissance" (Scene II, p. 406). The adoration of Narcissus by the Nymphs has a quasi-religious flavor as does his self-adoration. The scene of violence (Scene IV), in which Narcissus is attacked by the Nymphs, scratched, whipped, and disfigured, can be visualized, and undoubtedly should be staged, as a stylized, choreographed dance. At the very end of the scene where the Nymphs are about to strike Narcissus again, Valéry writes: "Tumulte et danse des coups autour du Narcisse" (p. 414). This scene, furthermore, is similar to a religious sacrifice. The intention of the scene becomes clear and achieves great poignancy when Narcissus bemoans the lack of a proper altar for the sacrifice: "Si sa beauté la voue à quelque sacrifice,/ Que l'on dressât du moins l'incomparable autel/ Sur quoi ce corps parfait s'offrît au coup mortel..." (Sc. VI, p. 416).

Scenes IV and VI present a Narcissus, who is a heroic figure, much like Prometheus in his defiance of the gods and in his disobediance of their order. His recalcitrance is presented as an act of purification, almost a rite, in which he strengthens and consecrates his intention to remain pure at any cost:

> O Justice... Je sens dans leur voix implacable
> L'affront que fait aux dieux le désir le plus pur...
> Ma Fontaine lucide, ils n'ont qu'un fleuve obscur
> Pour témoin ténébreux de leur toute-puissance...
> Mais mon âme est plus grande en désobéissance,
> Plus admirable est mon essence... (Sc. VI, p. 417).

A little later he adds: "Au noir serment répond le clair aveu:/ Ce n'est qu'à soi qu'il murmure: Je t'aime/ Sans jamais craindre un regard mensonger" (p. 419).

Valéry felt that Amphion, which he called a "mélodrame," approached "une cérémonie de caractère religieux" (O, II, 1282). Arensbach sees as the most liturgical aspect of Amphion and Sémiramis, the ending where the stage is left bare, the "moment" at the end of the play before the curtain drops. She writes: "the first and most apparent reason for this is that the part of the set to which our attention is directed after the main character leaves the stage is religious in nature: the Temple in Amphion, the Altar in Sémiramis."[19] She admits, however, that it is not this fact that determines the religious character of these works. She contends that it is because the main character is no longer present, and, consequently, Valéry could have written a mélodrame which would not have

had a religious symbol at the center of the stage but which would have, nevertheless, been a liturgical work.[20] She continues:

> I suggest this as the formula: draw the spectator's attention to a character and a problem he faces, let the character solve that problem then let him leave the stage, but do not let the curtain fall at that moment. Wait. The spectator remains before the empty stage, his interest on one level, the purely physical visual level, is necessarily directed to what is on the stage. But the spectator is still, if the dramatist has evinced any skill at all, thinking about the character. His eye perceives the stage but his mind is fixed on an absence. This moment is a brief one and the curtain does fall eventually.[21]

She feels that this brief moment before the lights go on and people begin milling about and looking for their coats is Valéry's way of trying to protect the audience from the eventual dissipation of the emotional or spiritual force of the production by constructing into the drama a time for them to absorb the total theatrical experience.[22]

Arensbach does not suggest that the Cantate is an example of Valéry's concept of Temple mélodrame, but it does have the requirements. An empty stage at the end of the drama is an intrinsic part of the Narcissus myth. In the Cantate, Narcissus disappears before the final scene. In fact, at the end of scene VI, Valéry writes: "Il disparaît" (p. 420). In the early version of the Cantate, published in La Nouvelle Revue Française, the

last scene is only a recapitulation of sounds and poetic fragments which were used earlier in the poem:

SCENE VII ET DERNIÈRE.

CHOEUR

Nymphes, Nymphes si vives, etc...

(Reprise des principaux motifs de la cantate, en guise de finale.)

The scene is merely an echo which does not necessarily require the Chorus to be on stage, but it keeps the spectator's mind on Narcissus. In the definitive version where the intention is more purely poetic, the following passage is added in addition to the echoes of earlier motifs sung by the Chorus and words uttered by the First Nymph who has been metamorphosed into the echo of Narcissus:

O Nuit tiède et profonde,
Un astre qui s'y mire est seul à trahir l'Onde.
Quel parfum trop subtil m'égare vers les bois?
Il fait battre mon coeur; il fait trembler ma
vois...
Délice, délice...

Except for the mirror fountain, which for both Narcissus and Valéry takes on almost religious signification, this ending ultimately leaves the stage bare, too, as the Nymph is drawn towards the woods. Only the perfume which haunts and disturbs her remains. It is like the scent

of incense left after a religious service. This interpretation of the ending will be made clearer in the final section where the poetry of the libretto is analyzed.

The empty stage is analogous to the blank page so often alluded to by Mallarmé and the Symbolist poets. Although the futility of Narcissus' quest is underlined, it is not so much sterility and "impuissance" which is being symbolized by the empty stage, but absence which is being evoked, and the attempt to express the ineffable and make it felt in the spectator. Valéry's intention to produce in the spectator "une émotion quasi-religieuse" is achieved.[23] The audience has witnessed a ritual comparable to a religious service.

The story of Narcissus with its inherent poetry, its well-known story, and its semi-divine hero provides Valéry with a suitable vehicle to put his theory of theater as "Temple" into practice. The ritualistic and stylized elements of the drama which Valéry enhances or invents remove the already unrealistic myth even further from narrative prose making it comparable to pure poetry.

In the broad sense, the subject of Valéry's theater is quite a different matter from his poetics. Huguette Laurenti in Paul Valéry et le théâtre has studied Valéry's dramatic theories with little reference to his

poetry.[24] However, Valéry seems to approach the problems of theater in much the same way he does poetry. He sees drama as an exercise, a testing ground for his evolving concept of what theater should be and do. Just as he posed difficult problems for himself when writing poetry, he sought to solve serious dramatic problems with his stage productions. Francis Scarfe suggests that the main interest of Amphion, Sémiramis and the Cantate du Narcisse is that we see Valéry "approaching and trying to solve one or two important dramatic problems [. . .]."[25] Scarfe reminds us that Valéry was dissatisfied with opera because it failed to integrate sufficiently the diverse elements from which it was composed. As a solution he proposed his theory of liturgical drama.

His attitude concerning tragedy and the spectator can be compared with his attitude toward the reader of poetry and the emotion of poetry. He defines tragedy by the effect it has on the spectator. The emotion of poetry is to be produced in the reader; it is not in the poet as such.

As I have already suggested, there is an important parallel between his liturgical aims for drama and his concept of pure poetry. Valéry so indicates when he says:

> Dans une action dramatique ordinaire, les mouvements, les gestes, les "temps", ne sont assujettis qu'à la représentation la plus "vraie" et la plus excitante de la "vie."

> La convention n'y paraît expressément que dans les oeuvres en vers et dans les opéras, dès que les acteurs ouvrent la bouche. On observe alors que leurs paroles sont d'un autre système que leurs actes. Cependant que ces personnes agissent comme on peut agir, elles s'expriment comme on ne s'exprime pas. Il y a une étrangeté et une sorte d'impureté [. . .].
>
> Mais supposé que l'on veuille que le spectacle soit plus pur, c'est à dire homogène, ou également distant de la vie en tous ses moyens de production, on est conduit à imposer des conditions et des restrictions conventionelles aux actes des personnages, et, par conséquent, au milieu dans lesquel ils se meuvent, aux durées et aux compositions successives de leurs présences. Il en peut résulter des oeuvres à valeur significative complexe; et c'est pourquoi j'ai employé le mot liturgique (O, II, 1575).

Just as poetry should avoid that which is utilitarian like ordinary speech since it would be too readily reduced to prose, theater should avoid what is realistic and what reminds us of everyday life. Otherwise the poetry and the action will clash. Impurity will result. The solution for drama is not to remove the poetry, but to harmonize the action with the poetry excluding any direct imitation of life on the stage when such imitation threatens to obscure the deeper meaning of the work.[26]

Discussion of the role of poetry in drama, especially in musical drama or opera is important with respect to Valéry's interest in Gluck. Critics inevitably mention Gluck when discussing Valéry's theater, but they do so

primarily in terms of his interest in recitative. Recitative was important to him in the composition of La Jeune Parque, and he discusses it in detail in essays and comments on the poem.[27] Laurenti comments on the importance of recitative to Valéry in both poetry and musical drama:

> Plus particulière au théâtre lyrique est la notion, chère à Valéry poète, de "récitatif." On sait l'usage qu'il en a fait dans la Jeune Parque, conçue d'abord, a-t-il dit, sur le modèle offert par Gluck. L'imitation de la liturgie et une meilleure connaissance de Wagner ne pouvaient que l'inciter à donner encore plus d'importance à ce mode de composition. D'autant que le "récitatif," s'il se présente comme un monologue, est bien la "suite" formelle susceptible de traduire la "suite" des états par lesquels passe, dans des "temps" donnés, le système "sensitivo-moteur-psychique" d'un individu. D'où l'importance qu'il y a à marquer l'assimilation avec la musique: d'une part, en "chantant" les vers, d'autre part, en marquant les changements de "ton," - ce qui introduit dans la composition poétique et dramatique cette notion de "modulation à laquelle Valéry tient tant.[28]

In addition to utilizing recitative in the manner of Gluck for the Cantate, Valéry's admiration for Gluck also centered on his theory of music in the service of poetry. This was, in fact, the most revolutionary part of Gluck's approach to opera, outlined in the preface to Alceste where he states that he has striven to restrict music to its true office of serving poetry by means of expression and by following the situations of the story without interrupting the action or stifling it with useless

ornament or superfluity.

From the way Germaine Tailleferre described composing sessions with Valéry, it is clear that Valéry, too, determined that the music of the Cantate should be subservient to the poetry, following precisely the diction of the verse. He wrote in the Cahiers: "30 oct. 1938 chez Germaine Tailleferre ...audition du Narcisse au piano - Elle a bien essayé de conserver le vers. Les compositeurs modernes ont peur de faire chanter. Peur de la phrase. Cependant c'est bien la base de la musique occidentale (quand ce n'est pas le danse)" (XXI, 687).

In many ways, Valéry's theater, and especially the Cantate, is a combination of his Symbolist heritage and his classicism. Although Valéry was always more interested in the poetry of Racine's drama rather than in the drama itself, there are other Racinian elements which he adopts for the Cantate in addition to aiming for pure, polished Racine-like alexandrines. Despite the fact that the play is in scenes, not in acts, many of the rules of classical drama are followed strictly. Most important is Valéry's rigid adherence to the unities of time, place, and action The most striking exception to classical dramaturgy is the central scene of violence, scene IV. Arensbach outlines how Valéry follows classical rules with regard to the linking of scenes and shows how the cantata is Racinian in its plot structure, character portrayal, and

use of classical verse.[29] The familiar theme of "aimer sans être aimé" is also utilized.

If Valéry's classicism was evident in the "Fragments," it is also readily observable in the Cantate. More interesting is Valéry's reversion to Symbolism. The characteristics of Symbolist theater, which Anna Balakian describes in The Symbolist Movement, comprise an important aspect of Valéry's cantata. Some of the elements which Valéry introduces may be seen as implicit stage directions which would, if they were followed, enhance the liturgical effects of the drama as well as place it in the vein of Symbolist theater.

The rapprochement of symbolism and liturgy brings to mind Mallarmé's theater-Mass,[30] Wagner's total theatre,[31] and Lugné-Poe's recognition of the need for a new dramatic concept according to which the theater is like a sanctuary and a place of meditation.

Valéry's aims seem to parallel these concepts, and there is some overlapping, but it should be pointed out that his vision is not subjective nor does it approach mysticism. Valéry uses the stage's power to evoke, to suggest, for example, the intense inner emotions of Narcissus and the first Nymph. As Balakian points out, there is little action in a Symbolist play, the atmosphere is one of intense inner vibrations.[32] Except for the one scene of violence, there is little material action in

Valéry's drama. The plaintive, poetic monologues and the dialogues between Narcissus and the first Nymph reveal what is going on in their minds and their hearts. There is more tension than conflict. Narcissus is ever absorbed in self. The Nymph becomes more and more introspective.

Using repetition much the way Maeterlinck does, so that it is like one musical instrument answering another, Valéry, in the first scene, has the Nymphs, one after another, repeat words and phrases. In the next scene, Narcissus takes up the same vocabulary. The final scene re-echoes the motifs again.

The haunting preoccupation with death, characteristic of Symbolist drama, is evident in the attitude of the Nymphs who are constantly bemoaning their immortality: "Vainement, vainement immortelles et belles." Narcissus is supremely conscious of what his fate will be as he defies the gods.

Reminding us of the perfumes injected into the air of Lugné-Poe's Symbolist theater, Balakian asks: "What better locus for synesthesia than the stage?"[33] Although Valéry did not say so explicitly, the perfume mentioned in the last speech of the cantata should be a stage effect. It would be in keeping with the liturgical elements of the drama (suggesting the incense of the Mass), and the Symbolist elements as well. The vapors surrounding the Nymph as she comes out of the fountain: "Ici, la

première nymphe sort de la Fontaine, qui se dégage des vapeurs qu'elle exhalait" (Sc. III, p. 408), are similar to the fogs and mists employed by Symbolist dramatists.

In addition to the perfume and the vapors, there is the matter of lighting. There are so few stage directions because they are unnecessary. Consider the lighting in this play. Although it has fundamental symbolic significance, it moves in a very obvious and logical way from sunlight to darkness. The play opens with both the Nymphs and Narcissus talking about the sun and emphasizing its presence. The poetry of the drama all the way through enhances the drama of light versus dark. Finally, the drama can only end in utter darkness: "O Nuit tiède et profonde." Clever production might find a way to evoke: "Un astre qui s'y mire est seul à trahir l'Onde."

Like Symbolist drama Valéry's play does not aim for entertainment in the usual sense. It does not have an ideological message and it does not produce an emotional catharsis. It is meant to evoke a contemplative mood in the audience which is enhanced by the empty stage and haunting perfume of the ending.

Although the subject of Valéry's Cantate du Narcisse as an expression of Symbolist theater is only sketched here, further study focusing on this aspect and including his other dramatic works could increase their understanding and the poet's dramatic intentions.

In the preceding discussion the Nymph was described as emerging from the fountain in a vapor cloud. Thus, she springs Aphrodite-like from the water. The expression used is "surgit de l'écume" (Sc. III, p. 408). The allusion is clear. The Nymph is a symbol of Love and Beauty in the drama. This Nymph, Première Nymph as she is called in the Cantate, is ultimately metamorphosed into Echo, and she has a number of definite similarities to Ovid's Echo. In addition to loving Narcissus and being sternly rebuffed by him as Echo was in Ovid's tale, she also later takes pity on him as Echo did near the end of the Metamorphoses.

In Valéry's drama, however, the heroine is multi-dimensional. Over and above her role as Echo, she is an ordinary nymph capable of instant transformation. In the first scene as Narcissus is approaching, she is a Dryad: "Moi, je deviens ce hêtre!..." (p. 406). Moreover, she is presented as woman, the temptress, trying to lure Narcissus from his pure dream of self-love. She becomes the typical woman scorned and bent on revenge. She is Nemesis-like: rebuffed by Narcissus, she feels that her anger is righteous and calls her fellow Nymphs to avenge her.[34] On the other hand, she is also an Oracle delivering the ultimatum of the gods, a "noir serment." She grows in self-knowledge and understanding: "Tu me touches le coeur...Tes plaintes sont trop vraies..."

(Sc. VI, p. 416). "Tu fais sans le savoir, d'une Nymphe, une Femme" (p. 416). "Pour la prèmiere fois, je me pris à...penser!/ C'est un étrange mal... Le coeur cherche à se mordre..." (p. 417). Clearly, the presence of this Nymph increases tension in the drama. In addition, Valéry has been able to demonstrate through her role his poetic virtuosity, for she has many of the most beautiful lines.

Characteristically, Valéry begins in medias res and, once again, does not tell the whole story of Narcissus' life as Ovid did, but Echo is not the only Ovidian element which Valéry utilizes. The metamorphosis of Narcissus into a flower is a significant development in Valéry's drama. In Ovid's account, Narcissus, after the recognition scene, realizes that he is dying and welcomes his approaching death. In the final scene we learn that he has been transformed into a flower. Valéry's Narcissus also knows that he will soon die, but, in addition, he is aware of his specific fate in advance. First, the oath indicates that he will be "repris par la nature" (Sc. VI, p. 417). Then the Nymph speaks to him of ". . . le destin d'une fleur" (p. 419), and finally he mentions it himself (p. 420).

Just as Narcissus loses his beauty in Ovid's tale, Valéry's hero does too. In Valéry's account, however, it is at the hands of the Nymphs while in the

Metamorphoses Narcissus' beauty fades as he pines away.

Of the other Ovidian elements which Valéry adopts, one, in particular, was emphasized in the Middle Ages. This is the theme of crime and punishment, the idea that to defy the command of Amor is to invite revenge. "Ton crime est d'ignorer tous les coeurs alentour," the Nymph tells Narcissus (Sc. V, p. 416). Narcissus' proud and cold rejection of the Nymph's love and all love except self-love brings down the wrath of the gods: "SI NARCISSE NE PEUT, SI NARCISSE NE VEUT/ AIMER D'AMOUR QUELQUE AUTRE QUE SOI-MEME/ RIEN D'HUMAIN N'EST EN LUI. SA BEAUTE LE CONDAMNE . . ." (p. 417). Amor is not specifically mentioned in Valéry's version, nor is Narcissus presented as an exemplus, but the emphasis on crime and punishment is similar.[35]

The motif of error or illusion plays a major part in Ovid's story, where unlike his lucid, modern counterpart, Narcissus does not recognize himself in the mirror of the pool until considerable time has elapsed. In Valéry's cantata, there is a brief moment which takes up the theme of illusion. Narcissus is momentarily fooled by the appearance of the Nymph as she comes out of the water: "serait-ce?...Est-ce donc toi, Toi, Narcisse, qui sors [. . .] Viens... TOI... Viens te chérir aux bras de ton pareil..." (Sc. 3, p. 408).

Valéry returns briefly to a thematic element from

Ovid which he used in his earlier Narcissus poems - the thirst motif: "O mon Désir, murmure à mon désir,/ Quelle grand soif ma lèvre qui t'effleure/ Se sent de moi que je puis saisir!..." (Sc. II, p. 407). "Vous!... Mais je n'ai pour soif qu'une amour sans mélange" (Sc. III, p. 410). In a variation on the theme, the Nymph too has an unslakeable thirst: "Car le son de sa voix si tendre/ Donne soif de mourir..." (Sc. I, p. 405). Finally, there is the obliteration theme. In Ovid's tale, Narcissus' tears disturb the reflection in the pool and the image disappears for a moment. Valéry's lucid Narcissus is aware of this distressing possibility:

> Mais, Rose de l'Onde,
> Si je baise, ô Bouche
> La Nappe de l'Onde
> Mon souffle effarouche
> La face du monde...
> Le moindre soupir
> Que j'exhalerais
> Me viendrait ravir
> Ce que j'adorais [. . .](Sc. II, p. 407)

Together with his references to Ovid's Metamorphoses, Valéry adds a number of other mythical allusions. I have already mentioned Aphrodite and the fact that Narcissus is like Prometheus.[36] Other allusions include a brief reference to the Muses and the Naiads. The oath is a Stygian oath. The attack on Narcissus by the Nymphs in scene four is surely meant to evoke the Erinyes, known for their avenging acts.[37]

These mythological allusions are an indication of Valéry's increased classicism. They also serve a practical purpose. They make the production more stylized and remove it further from the everyday world which was Valéry's intention. His continued ability to revitalize Ovidian elements reconfirms his poetic power and establishes his dramatic abilities. Analysis of this aspect alone refutes those who see nothing new in the Cantate.

Furthermore, even a brief look at the libretto shows that Valéry, in this final period of his life, still has the great poetic gifts which have made his poetry world famous. While there are a number of facile epithets and rhymes, some slight lapses in rigor,[38] and fewer of the dazzling technical coups found in the "Fragments," nevertheless, what remains is simple and charming poetic verses sung by the Nymphs and a large number of carefully controlled and polished alexandrines in the arias and recitatives of Narcissus and the first Nymph, more than enough to confirm that there has been no serious decline.

The first important poetic development of the libretto occurs immediately. It is the epigraph which links the new work with the "Fragments." Despite the fact that Valéry has emphasized that the Cantate is "tout différent du Narcisse en deux états que son auteur a publiés jadis et naguère," he obviously did not mean to dissassociate completely the final Narcissus poem from

the earlier ones. He chose to bind them most dramatically by using as an epigraph a passage which occurs near the end of the first "fragment" (ll. 122-127):

> O semblable! et pourtant plus parfait que moi-même,
> Ephémère immortel si clair devant mes yeux,
> Pâles membres de perle et ces cheveux soyeux,
> Faut-il qu'à peine aimés l'ombre les obscurcisse,
> Et que la nuit déjà nous divise, ô Narcisse,
> Et glisse entre nous deux le fer qui coupe un fruit!

The six-line sequence is one of the most distinctive in the earlier poem.[39] A number of the conventional poetic devices which we have come to expect in the "Fragments" appear again: alliteration - "pourtant plus parfait," oxymoron - "Ephémère immortel," the clair/obscur antithesis, and the dramatic metaphor of the last two lines where the night is like a knife dividing the body from its image. Over and above their poetic import, the lines have a major prophetic function announcing themes and developments in the drama to come. The "ephémère immortel" is surely meant to evoke the flower Narcissus will become. The lines also suggest that the basic theme of the earlier version is important to the new drama as well. Though the cantata is externally focused on the problem of Narcissus' unwillingness to be corrupted by human love, the drama of the quest for absolute consciousness is implied. As is often the case in Valéry's poetry, the "o" symbolizes the water - it suggests Eau aurally, and visually it resembles the circular shape of a pool of water. This

roundness is re-echoed in the circular shape of a whole fruit, the two halves of which are separated by a knife. The correspondence "ô" meaning Eau, Narcissus' double, taken a step farther becomes the symbol of a head, for the water is ultimately a representation of mind. The body wishes to become one with absolute mind, that is, to possess total knowledge of self. The metaphor of the night as knife, obscuring the image, hints, too, at the violence to come in scene IV and the idea that Narcissus must be sacrificed because of his defiance of the gods.

There are poetic passages in the Cantate itself which connect it to the earlier poems, especially the "Fragments." The lines, however, are often totally re-written with only a hint or suggestion of an earlier development, unlike the very close parallel lines connecting "Narcisse parle" and the "Fragments." A section of Narcissus' first long aria which can be compared to both poems follows:

> Tout mon sort n'est qu'obéissance
> A la force de mon amour.
> Cher CORPS, je m'abandonne à ta seule puissance;
> L'eau tranquille m'attire où je me tends mes bras:
> A ce vertige pur je ne résiste pas.
> Que puis-je ô ma Beauté, faire que tu ne veuilles?
> Je foule pour me joindre et mon ombre et les
> feuilles.
> Je ressens tout le prix de chacun de mes pas.
> O Narcisse, ô Moi-même, ô Même qui m'accueilles
> Par tes yeux dans mes yeux, délices de nos yeux,
> Je froisse l'or bruyant des roseaux radieux
> Que presse le doux poids de ma chair précieuse,
> Pour te voir de plus près et me sourire mieux...

PARLE, Sourire pur qu'environnent les cieux;
Oh!...Que tu formes bien, Bouche silencieuse,
La figure des voeux qu'une lèvre pieuse
Adresse au plus proche des dieux!
(Sc. II, p. 407).

This sequence is similar in vocabulary, tone, general content, and intensity to the earlier poems. The approach to the water's edge is similar, the unwavering adoration of the body appears again, the mention of leaves and reeds, the focus on the eyes and the mouth, the re-use of words like "obeissance," "puissance," "délices," "or," "vertige," etc. All of these have appeared over and over again in the different versions of the earlier poems. The last three lines above, though different in meaning, may be a variation on the lines from the first "fragment:" "Mon coeur jette aux échos l'éclat does noms divins!/ Mais que ta bouche est belle en ce muet blasphème" (ll. 20-21).

There is a close parallel between the lines from the Cantate: "Fontaine, ma fontaine, ô transparent tombeau/ De maint oiseau blessé qu'ensevelit ton sable" (Sc. VI, p. 417) and the sequence in the second fragment which begins: "Fontaine, ma fontaine, eau froidement présente [. . .] eau calme qui recueilles [. . .] L'oiseau mort, le fruit mur, lentement descendus."

The sunset, orchestrated in a minor key, nevertheless, calls to mind the earlier famous passage beginning "O douceur de survivre . . . ." The Nymph sings:

> L'or en cendres descend sur la forme des choses;
> Tout l'orgueil du soleil n'est plus que peu de roses
> Qui périssent sur l'horizon...(Sc. VI, p. 418)

Narcissus' declarations of self-love are similar, and there is a beautiful echo of a line from "Narcisse parle: "Narcisse... ce nom même est un tendre parfum" becomes "Ce nom si doux Narcisse... Et comme parfumé." In general considerable use of vocabulary from the earlier poems characterizes the Cantate. Like Racine and Mallarmé, Valéry has a special, limited poetic vocabulary which he uses to full advantage.

The problem of lighting and the chiaroscuro effect utilized by Valéry have been discussed with respect to each poem. I have alluded to its presence in the Cantate in the discussion of stage lighting. The antithesis of dark/light is an important part of the poetry, but in some respects it is not as effective as it was earlier. The line "Au noir serment répond le clair aveu," for instance, seems too facile. Somewhat less forced is: "Ma Fontaine lucide, ils n'ont qu'un fleuve obscur/Pour témoin ténébreux de leur toute-puissance...." Much more subtle and accomplished are the Nymph's lines:

> Vous n'aimiez que de l'onde et je suis certitude.
> Ma présence n'est point captive d'un miroir;
> Je suis mieux que lumière et ne meurs point le soir.
> Même, au coeur de la nuit, je vous ferai connaître
> Plus ardement qu'au jour tout le feu de mon être:
> L'excès de ma tendresse aux ténèbres se tient.
> (Sc. III, p. 409).

Greater simplicity than is usually found in Valéry's work was necessary to assure the possibility of success for this musical drama. Lines difficult to interpret because of complicated syntax would have slowed the work down unbearably. As it is, the balance is a delicate one which Valéry may have tipped unfavorably with some of the longer recitatives where it is important to hear each word but probably difficult without straining especially if the audience is unfamiliar with the libretto. Of course, the fact that Valéry insisted on the music following the diction of the verse so closely would help considerably in promoting comprehension. Relief is afforded also by a number of short, beautiful arias and refrains and by some simple special effects which allow the audience to continue to contemplate a preceding serious passage.

Earlier, in the discussion of the Cantate as a Symbolist drama, I pointed out how the Nymphs echo one another and how Narcissus later uses exactly the same vocabulary. In terms of poetic theory this repetition reflects Valéry's continued concern with the necessity for "enchaînement." In practical terms it functions to keep the mood and key motifs before the audience when they might otherwise be oscured by a long monologue.

Another kind of direct echo is used effectively. Two examples follow from Scene II:

Les Nymphes

Narcisse, Narcisse...

L'Echo

Cisse, Cisse.

Les Nymphes

Défiguré,
Désespéré!...

L'Echo

Ré... Ré..

The first is particularly evocative. "Cisse" is a botanical term, and it means "vigne vierge," a possible subtle reference to Narcissus' imminent metamorphosis.[40] It is very close in sound to "cesse." Narcissus asks "Que me veulent ces voix?" and the same echo is repeated again. The Nymphs, of course, want him to cease loving himself and to love them instead. The syllable "Ré," which is also a musical note, means repetition. It personifies Echo.

The most important of these special effects requires special analysis because it enhances both the symbolism of the work and its liturgical aspects. In the poem "Narcisse parle," there was the subtle suggestion of Narcissus' transformation into a flower, but the flower referred to in the poem was a lily. The poem began "O Frères, tristes lys . . ." and other lines of the poem were tied to this opening. Isn't the same flower meant to

be suggested aurally at the end of the Cantate by the sound of the word "délice" which sounds the same as "des lys"?

This idea can be supported in a number of ways. In the first place, it should be pointed out that the word "délice" is used earlier in the cantata. The Nymphs use it as they continue to bemoan the fact that they do not know the transports of love and to suggest their desire to be loved by Narcissus: "Amour, Amour sans fruit, sans espoir de délice (Sc. I, p. 406). Narcissus uses it, too, as he experiences the exquisite pleasure of beholding the eyes of the image he loves: "Par tes yeux, dans mes yeux, délices de nos yeux" (Sc. II, p. 407)

The word "Délice" in the finale is still related to Narcissus, love and desire. At the end of scene six, a moment before he disappears, Narcissus sings:

> Mais je vois dans vos yeux
> Des larmes
> Que j'aime encore mieux...
> En vain, dans leur fauve demeure,
> Les sombres Maîtres de l'Azur
> Ont voulu que Narcisse meure
> Si son orgueil se garde pur;
> En vain parlent-ils par la foudre,
> Menacent-ils de le dissoudre,
> De le réduire à quelque fleur,
> Ce destin ne sera des pires
> Si quelquefois tu me respires;
> L'ombre odorante espère un pleur...
> (Sc. VI, p. 419-20).

Knowing that as she breathes the perfume of the flower he will become, she will go on loving him and mourning him

with her tears gives Narcissus a kind of immortality which he sees as a victory over the gods. The Nymph of the final scene is also transported and haunted by the perfume of the flower. The passage keeps our mind on the absent Narcissus in every possible way. The "délice" of the ending evokes the metamorphosed Narcissus:

> Quel parfum trop subtil m'égare vers les bois?
> Il fait battre mon coeur; il fait trembler ma voix...
> Délice, délice...
>
> CHOEUR
> Délice...
> Etc. (Sc. VII, p. 421).

A further indication that "délice" is meant to evoke "lys" is related to the incense quality of the scent which I discussed earlier in reference to the liturgical implications. In 1890 Valéry wrote a minor sonnet entitled "Fleur mystique." Recognizing that it is an exaggerated example of the point being made here concerning the incense quality, the liturgical effect, and the evocative power of the lily according to Valéry, I quote it in full without further comment.

> Lys mystique! Elle avait la ferveur des Elus
> Et Vierge! Elle adorait les pieds calmes des Vierges;
> Dans l'étincellement des métaux et des cierges,
> Sa voix douce tintait comme un doux Angélus.

Une couleur de lune ondulait sous son voile.
Et, dans sa chair, semblaient fuir les reflets
nacrés
Du petit jour luisant sur les vases sacrés
Aux messes du matin, vers la dernière étoile.

Ses yeux étaient plus clairs que des astres
naissants?
Indicible parfum de cires et d'encens,
Son vêtement sentait la vieille sacristie!

Et c'est en la voyant que le regret me vint
De n'être pas le Christ de ce rêve Divin
Car son visage pâle était comme une Hostie![41]

The finale of the cantata may be as richly symbolic as anything Valéry has written. In terms of the drama, visually, it is true that he has left the stage empty. The main character is gone. Thoughts of him remain. This is not true of the "Fragments." Elizabeth Sewell says:

> They say poetry is compact of images - but here Valéry goes one further, for his image of the end of life and thought is an absence of an image. In Valéry's mirror there is no spectre, no form of death, angelic or sepulchral. There is only a darkened stretch of water, the pool untenanted, the mirror dead and one holds one's breath a moment.[42]

While there is an absence of image at the end of the "Fragments," this is not true for "Narcisse parle." It is only partially true for the Cantate. At the end of "Narcisse parle," there are tears and the suggestion of a flower. At the end of the Cantate du Narcisse, Narcissus is absent, and the flower is absent too but it

is strongly suggested by the perfume and the word "Délice." Tears are hoped for - "L'ombre odorante espère un pleur ..." What does remain is a single star: "Un astre qui s'y mire est seul à trahir l'Onde."[43]

A detailed study of images of flowers, stars, and tears should be made because Valéry's poetry is so rich in them. The flower of the Cantate may symbolize pure thought.[44] The tears often symbolize poems as they seemed to at the end of "Narcisse parle." The reason for the star may be more complicated. Valéry conceived of a third Narcissus poem. He describes the projected work in the following passage written in 1926.

> Mon intention fut, il y a quelques années, de publier un recueil de mes divers Narcisse, et d'en faire un livre aussi beau par la forme et par la substance que ce misérable adolescent croyait de l'être. J'aurais écrit pour cet ouvrage une où diverses pages ou j'aurais expliqué ma metaphysique de ce mythe; je veux dire quelque idée abstraite que j'en ai, qui ne paraît point dans ces vers et n'y peut paraître et qui m'est venue en les faisant.
>
> Mais l'achèvement du troisième de ces poèmes était supposé par ce dessein. Quoique j'ai ébauché cette fin, où l'on eut vu la nuit tombée sur la fontaine, l'image adorée abolie, et, à sa place, tout le ciel étoilé reflété par l'eau ténébreuse; toutefois je n'en viendrai jamais à bout, car le loisir, l'humeur, les forces, la patience manquent et manqueront, c'est pourquoi je n'ai pas interdit à quelques personnes de faire imprimer cet ensemble imparfait.[45] (My emphasis).

Finally, in 1938 he wrote the Cantate du Narcisse. He maintained in the Avis, however, that this work was different from the others implying that it was not the projected third work, and no critic seems to think it is. Most of the last scene was added after the 1941 edition to enhance the poetry of the work. The single star which does not appear in the early versions may be a subtle admission by Valéry that the Cantate is more important than he had indicated at first even though it is not the third poem he originally planned.

A significant aspect of the importance of the Cantate lies in the fact that examination of it adds to our knowledge of Valéry's poetic theory. Primarily, it reinforces basic concepts which have been introduced in the first two chapters. For instance, Valéry's approach to theater which involves solving problems and aims at producing certain calculated effects re-emphasizes his poetic method which is to take up poetry as a serious exercise in which he poses difficult problems for himself. The consequence is that he exercises the mind and increases poetic effects as he intends. Also, his effort to purify the drama by stylizing the action so that it would be in harmony with the poetry corresponds to his theory of pure poetry.

Writing still another variation on the Narcissus theme accentuates his theory that the poet can spend his

lifetime successfully rewriting the same poem because it is the poetry and the labor of poetry which are fundamental. In addition, his abiding attention to the beautiful details of poetry is clearly visible in the text of the Cantata where chiseled alexandrines blend with simple but artful lines of varied length, and alliteration, simile, antithesis, etc. are carefully employed.

The important role of language in poetry and the poet's duty to work on it are underlined by his careful choice of vocabulary and the suggestive, evocative effects he is able to produce by means of word echoes. Furthermore, he continues to apply his theory of "enchaînement." Finally, his ability to recast motifs from Ovid's Metamorphoses reconfirms his poetic power and versatility.

While it is essential not to praise the Cantate excessively, nor to make it seem more important than it is, it is necessary to realize that it is a viable theatrical expression of Valéry's most important myth. Though poetically successful, it does not have the concentrated proliferation of poetic conventions evidenced in the "Fragments." For example, many of its comparisons are much simpler: "Il est souple comme une palme," and "Tout mon corps prend le vol d'une flèche qui plonge." On the other hand, the alliteration is no less beautiful. Furthermore, there is a beauty and simplicity in many of the exchanges between the Nymph and Narcissus which are

reminiscent of Racine:

Le Narcisse

Je suis seul. Je suis moi. Je suis vrai.
Je vous hais.

La Première Nymph

Et si je m'essayais d'être plus que vous-même
D'être toi plus que toi, mieux que toi, moi
qui t'aime (Sc. III, 410).

There is great simplicity and poignancy in lines like:

Voici pour vous le dernier jour du monde
Où rien de pur ne pare qu'un moment...(Sc. VI, 420).

The attack of the nymphs is an attack of sounds as well as a physical assault. The lines approach onomotopoeia:

Chacune son lambeau!...
Frappe, griffe, cogne!... Et tords et mords et crache,
Fouette, cingle, pince!... Entame, écorche, arrache...

The poetry is the most important element of the work. The music and the drama are meant to serve the aims of poetry, and Valéry approaches theater as he does poetry. The work is an exercise, but it is a reasonably successful exercise having dramatic possibilities often overlooked.

Like Valéry's major poems, La Jeune Parque, "Le Cimetière marin" and the "Fragments du Narcisse," it is a variation on the theme of the tension evoked in the mind considering the desire for pure contemplation or the will to action. Narcissus is tempted by the Nymph, but he remains pure and uncorrupted, preferring the infinite

possibilities of his own self since he is aware of the inevitable imperfection of action, expressed here as love for another.

Valéry has, in a sense, come full circle with the Cantate and reverted to his early heritage: Symbolism, but it is a mature, often original Symbolism, tempered by his strong classical aims.

NOTES

[1]The Cantate du Narcisse appears in O, I, 403-421. All references will be listed by scene and page.

[2]Ailene Corry Arensbach, The Theatre of Paul Valéry (Dissertation: Emory University, 1971), p. 92.

[3]"L'Idée fixe," for example, first produced in January 1966, was staged with great success.

[4]Suhami, p. 117. She does not have these difficulties with Amphion or Sémiramis.

[5]Stanislas Fumet, "La 'Cantate du Narcisse' de Paul Valéry," Arts, 212 (avril 1949), 2.

[6]Frédéric Robert. "Valéry et ses musiciens," Europe, v. 49, no. 507 (1971), 101-110.

[7]Lettres à quelques-uns, pp. 62-63.

[8]Honegger was also music composer for Sémiramis.

[9]This group of musicians consisted of Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, Durey, and Auric, in addition to Tailleferre. The name "Les Six" came from a critic's comparison with the more famous Russian Five.

[10]Robert, p. 108

[11]Robert, p. 109.

[12]Robert, p. 109.

[13]Robert, p. 109.

[14]This important essay on Valéry's theater concepts is found in O, I, 1277-1283.

[15]"Notes sur un tragique et une tragédie" in Lucien Fabre, Dieu est innocent (Paris: Nagel, 1946), p. XII.

[16]Arensbach, p. 62.

[17]Arensbach, p. 65.

[18]Francis Scarfe, The Art of Paul Valéry (Kingswood: Windmill Press, 1954), p. 295.

[19]Arensbach, p. 89.

[20]Arensbach, p. 89-90.

[21]Arensbach, p. 90.

[22]Arensbach, p. 90.

[23]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 210.

[24]Huguette Laurenti, Paul Valéry et le théâtre (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

[25]Scarfe, p. 290.

[26]Paraphrased from "Histoire d'Amphion," O, II, 1282.

[27]See for example, the essay "Le prince et la Jeune Parque," O, I, 1491-96.

[28]Laurenti, p. 124.

[29]Arensbach, p. 92. Reference is also made to the Corneille-like combination of alexandrines with other meters.

[30]But Mallarmé's idea of theater-Mass was ultimately linked to his theory of the "universal Book."

[31]For a helpful introduction to Valéry's interest in Wagner, see Laurenti, especially chapter 2, pp. 47-66.

[32]Anna Balakian, The Symbolist Movement, A Critical Appraisal (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 124.

[33]Balakian, p. 126.

[34]Ovid mentions Nemesis, the Rhamnusian goddess of righteous anger, line 406.

[35]There are other motifs which are reminiscent of the approach of the Middle Ages to the Narcissus myth - the Rose, for example.

[36]Dufford also mentions the Promethean character of Narcissus, p. 71.

[37]Arensbach sees as the model for this scene the "Dance of the Furies" in the second act of Gluck's Orphée et Eurydice.

[38]A few "chevilles" for example.

[39]Michel Décaudin in "Narcisse: une sorte d'autobiographie poétique" p. 55, states, incorrectly, that Valéry chose as epigraph two lines of the first fragment.

[40]Walter von Wartburg, Franzosishes etymologisches wörterbuch (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949), v. 2, p. 715.

[41]Correspondance Valéry-Fourment, p. 215. The poem was first published in Bulletin de l'Association des étudiants no. 34 (1891), 321.

[42]Elizabeth Sewell, Paul Valéry, The Mind in the Mirror (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 25.

[43]Cf. Mallarmé, the "sonnet en-yx."

[44]Recall Valéry's lines in the "Fragments;" "Voir/ sur mon front l'orage et les feux d'un secret,/ Voir, ô merveille, voir ma bouche nuancée/ Trahir... peindre sur l'onde une fleur de pensée."

[45]Quoted in O, I, 1672 from Etudes pour Narcisse, la Note sur 'Narcisse' à Monsieur Julien P. Monod, dated 17 May 1926.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to arrive at a synthesis of Valéry's poetic theory by means of his three major Narcissus works. There is no one doctrine in which Valéry expresses his poetics. Valéry has written no single book on the subject. The problem of how to seize, present, and articulate the essentials of an unsystematized poetic theory which appears here and there in essays, letters, lectures, and aphorisms, as well as in the Cahiers and the poems themselves, is a difficult one to solve. Close examination of the Narcissus poems and their variants which cover about fifty years of Valéry's poetic career were used as a means to this end. Study of the poems, correlated with a number of Valéry's statements on the art of poetry, reveals a surprisingly self-consistent, homogeneous body of ideas and leads to a clearer understanding of the major tenets of Valéry's poetic theory by uncovering and underscoring the major tendencies and practices of his art.

Generally indifferent to his public, detached from any need to please anyone but himself, Valéry was a poet who indulged in a constant dialogue with himself about poetry. His poetic theory was centered on considerations about the poet creating poetry, as he indicated: "Mes

vers n'ont eu pour moi d'autre intérêt direct que de me suggérer bien des réflexions sur le poète."[1]

His study of poetic creation was, on the whole, quite independent from historical and critical considerations. Valéry searched his own mind for the truth of any issue rather than looking outward. Even in the early imitative period, his theory of poetry was self-reflective, hyper-conscious, and personal. His is a rational description of the poetic act with poetry treated almost as a laboratory experiment. He was a constant critic of naive conceptions of inspiration, and he emphatically insisted on the deliberate, calculated aspects of poetic composition.

The Narcissus poems are a firm expression of his conviction that there is a multiplicity of angles from which the poet, through his imagery and by conscious effort, can approach the same theme, thereby learning more about the creative act and the workings of the mind. His system of rewriting and revising, clearly evidenced by examination of the Narcissus works, proves that poetry for him was a long labor in which the poet attempted to utilize his full conscious powers and all the tools of his poetic trade. Right from the outset when Valéry used a fixed form, the sonnet, for the earliest versions of "Narcisse parle" it was obvious that artistic discipline was a major tenet of his poetic canon.

The version of "Narcisse parle" written for

La Conque is imitative. The poems and poetic aims of Mallarmé have been a model. The techniques and theories of Poe were put into practice. Mallarmé inspired in Valéry a thirst for pure, absolute poetry and, in the early period, a faith in the poet's superhuman power to celebrate, understand, and communicate the mysteries of the universe. As Judith Robinson points out, Mallarmé made him aware that poetry at its finest can create a self-sufficient language of its own in which a very high degree of purity and precision is perfectly compatible with a mysterious and haunting magic.[2] In Poe, Valéry saw that the power of the intellect could reduce poetry to a scientific maneuver of the sensibility and perception so that calculated poetic effects might be obtained. Specific details adhered to at first and made part of his poetic theory were rejected later such as the theory that the poem must not be more than one hundred lines long. He retained Poe's dictum to use alliteration and repetition for maximum effect and studied and experimented on the concept which makes the last line of the poem the most important of all.

Having examined in detail the differences between the 1890 version of "Narcisse parle," the new version for the Album de vers anciens and the incorporation of similar motifs and vocabulary for both the "Fragments" and the Cantate, it is obvious that the poet labors and experiments, that he constantly seeks technical improvements by working on language, by aiming at more careful control of imagery,

even hesitating over the choice of a preposition or a period. Each expression of the myth shows the same attention to the beautiful details of poetry.

Two of Valéry's most important poetic theories: pure poetry and the concept of "enchaînement" were clarified by observation and analysis of them in the "Fragments." While "Narcisse parle" was an expression of Symbolist poetics, the "Fragments" demonstrated Valéry's classical aims, and the Cantate is an effective combination of the two tendencies.

For Valéry, artistic creation involved setting limits, never allowing himself unrestrained freedom. As a poet and a dramatist, he posed difficult technical problems for himself. He moved from form to content. Rhyme engenders an idea. The rhyme is not forced to adapt to a preconceived thought. It is the poet's conscious and artful use of all of the conventions and rhetorical devices of poetry which creates the poetic universe. Valéry comes back to this often repeated idea in a lecture given in Brussels in 1942:

> La poésie va consister à s'écarter du langage ordinaire et à faire profiter un discours en vers, par exemple, des ressources qui sont généralement négligées dans l'usage pratique de la langue. Nous voyons alors intervenir le rythme, les sonorités, les timbres de la langue, les allitérations, les consonances, etc., etc., et puis, d'autre part, du côté significatif, vous trouverez alors toute cette broderie d'images, de métaphores, de comparaisons, qui feront que le discours ne ressemblera bientôt plus à

> un discours ordinaire. Tout le monde saura, en constatant que la musique est introduite, qu'on se trouve dans un autre monde, le monde de la poésie.[3]

The poet speculates on sound and sense, researching the effects of language as he creates and revises his poem. He seeks a refined, disciplined poetic language but being sensitive to the language of poetry he realizes that "l'ambiguïté est le domaine propre de la poésie."[4] This does not result in obscurity for the sake of obscurity nor intentional vagueness. It is an awareness of the complexity and plurality of association which is latent in a perfected poetic language which is essential for pure poetry.

Valéry realized that to discover and recreate the music of poetry required a long process of research into the sounds of syllables, the meanings of words and word phrases and their combinations. His interest in diction and the rhythm of verse resulting in the combination of poetry and music in the Cantate was a part of this serious research on language.

While Valéry was no longer at the height of his poetic career when he wrote the Cantate, there was no serious poetic decline. The same attitudes toward theory prevail. Poetry is still seen as a serious intellectual exercise. A poem is never finished. Multiple solutions are always possible and should be attempted.

Valéry was always concerned with the poem for the poem's sake. He was wary of its discursive possibilities.

He avoided, as much as possible, the narrative, the didactic, and the philosophical since these elements allow the ready reduction of poetry to a prose statement, and this is inimical to the ideal of pure poetry.

Through the Narcissus poems, Valéry has found a way to reconcile the struggle between his intense lyrical strain and his preferred rational side. He revitalizes the Narcissus myth so that the conflict between being and knowing is given full artistic expression. The intellectualization of the myth makes it a superior vehicle for focusing on the beauty of the body, the acute awareness of the senses, and the intensity of the emotions while, on another level, he is able to convey the highly conscious, highly critical operations of the mind. The Narcissus myth is symbolically suited to express the artist's dialogue with himself.

The cumulative impression which the Narcissus poems produce about Valéry's poetic theory is one of unity and continuity. Valéry's characteristic tone and his fundamental poetic preoccupations remained unaltered over the fifty year period. His practice and his theory were consistent. Consciousness was the fundamental element in Valéry's idea of the poetic process. This was expressed figuratively and literally by his use of the Narcissus myth.

Functioning as a poetic autobiography of his development, the Narcissus poems present Valéry continuously seeking to perfect his craft through concentration

and effort, refining his poetic techniques, working on language, aiming at precision, always revising and improving.

He always maintained that poetry only interested him to the extent in which it urged the mind to transformations. He sought:

> La force de plier le verbe commun
> à des fins imprévues sans rompre
> les "formes consacrées," la capture
> et la réduction des choses difficiles
> à dire; et surtout, la conduite simultanée de la syntaxe, de l'harmonie et
> des idées (qui est le problème de la
> plus pure poésie), sont à mes yeux les
> objets suprêmes de notre art (O, I, 1500).

His theory of poetry was personal, based on his own practices and speculations. It was a looking inward, totally in line with his broader intellectual preoccupations with the mind and its potential. The close examination of the Narcissus poems has demonstrated that Valéry's poetic theory was not a dogmatic system, but a never ending search, that he preferred to explore rather than assert, to test rather than affirm.

NOTES

[1]Lettres à quelques-uns, p. 159.

[2]Judith Robinson, "The Place of Literary and Artistic Creation in Valéry's Thought," Modern Language Review, 56 (1961), 504.

[3]Paul Valéry, Souvenirs poétiques (Paris: Guy le Prat, 1947), pp. 37-38.

[4]Cahiers, VI, p. 343.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dorothy Hopkins Schnare was born June 26, 1938, in Berlin, New Hampshire. She graduated from Berlin High School with highest honors in 1956 and from the University of New Hampshire cum laude in 1960, with a B.A. in French.

For two years, 1964-66, she taught English and was school librarian at St. James Major High School in New Orleans, Louisiana. She also attended Louisiana State University in New Orleans.

In 1969, she entered graduate school at the University of Florida with a teaching assistantship in French. Since receiving her M.A. in March, 1972, she has continued her studies toward the Ph.D. supported, in part, by an NDEA fellowship.

She is a member of the American Association of Teachers of French, the Modern Language Association and the South Atlantic Modern Language Association.

She is married to Dr. Paul S. Schnare of the Department of Mathematics of Colby College. She is the mother of three sons, Sigmund, Col and Kurt (deceased).

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Raymond Gay-Crosier, Chairman
Professor of Romance Languages

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Albert B. Smith
Associate Professor of
Romance Languages

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Herman E. Spivey
Professor of English

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Romance Languages in the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dean, Graduate School

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